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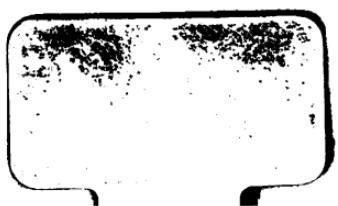
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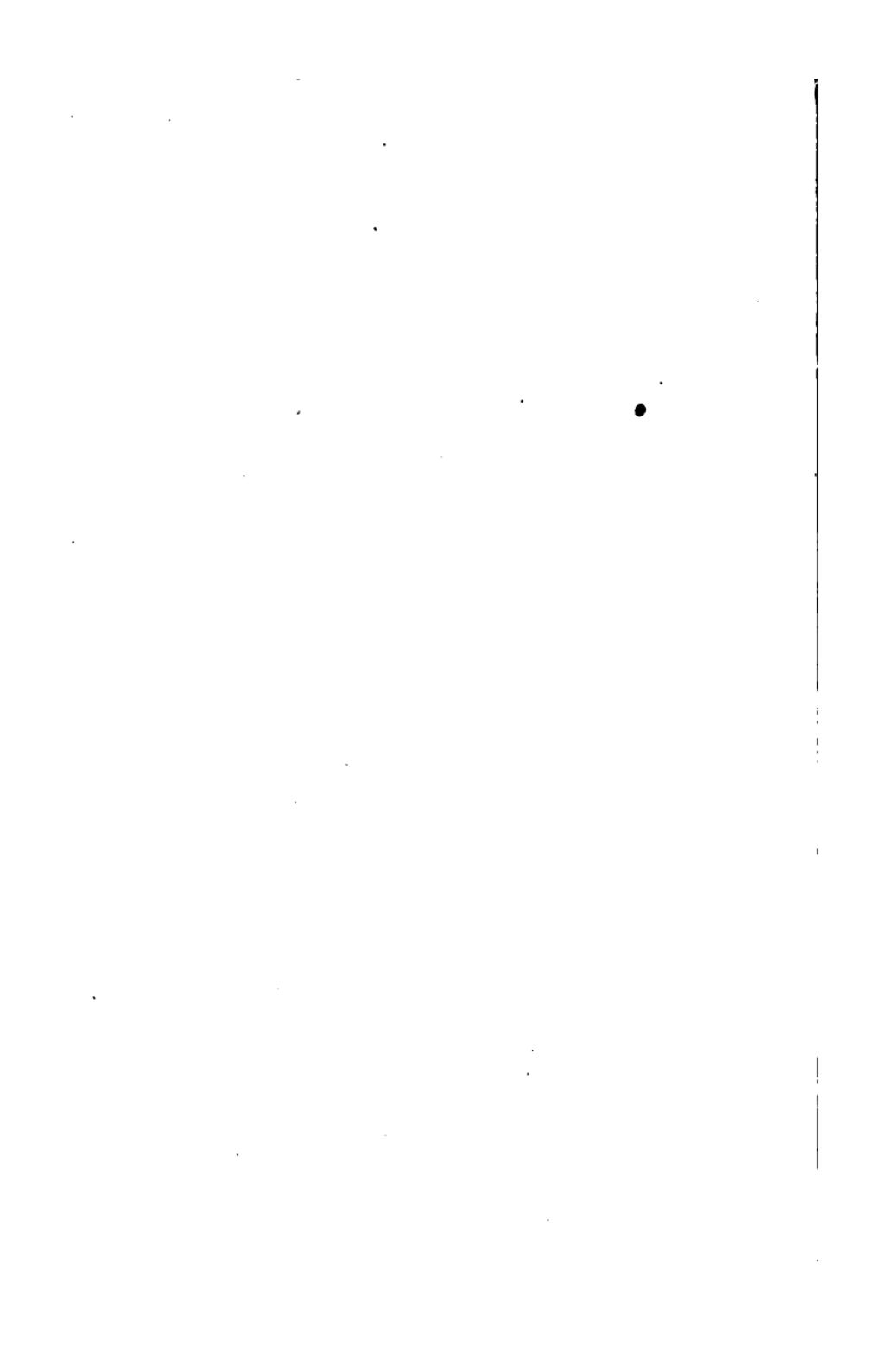












# ELIJAH.

## A COURSE OF LECTURES

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

ST. JAMES'S, WESTMINSTER,

ON THE

*Fridays in Lent.*

A.D. 1862.

BY

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of Clark's "Foreign Theological Library;" and to the vigorous article on Elijah in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible;" then to the judicious and sensible notes of the "Paragraph Bible," published by the Religious Tract Society; and to Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine." I also read, with much interest and pleasure, the sketch of Elijah in Evans's "Scripture Biography," and dipped into Krummacher's "Elijah." This last, I confess, failed to attract me; and, so far as I am conscious, it has had no influence upon the composition of these Discourses.

J. E. K.

ST. JAMES'S RECTORY,  
*May, 1862.*

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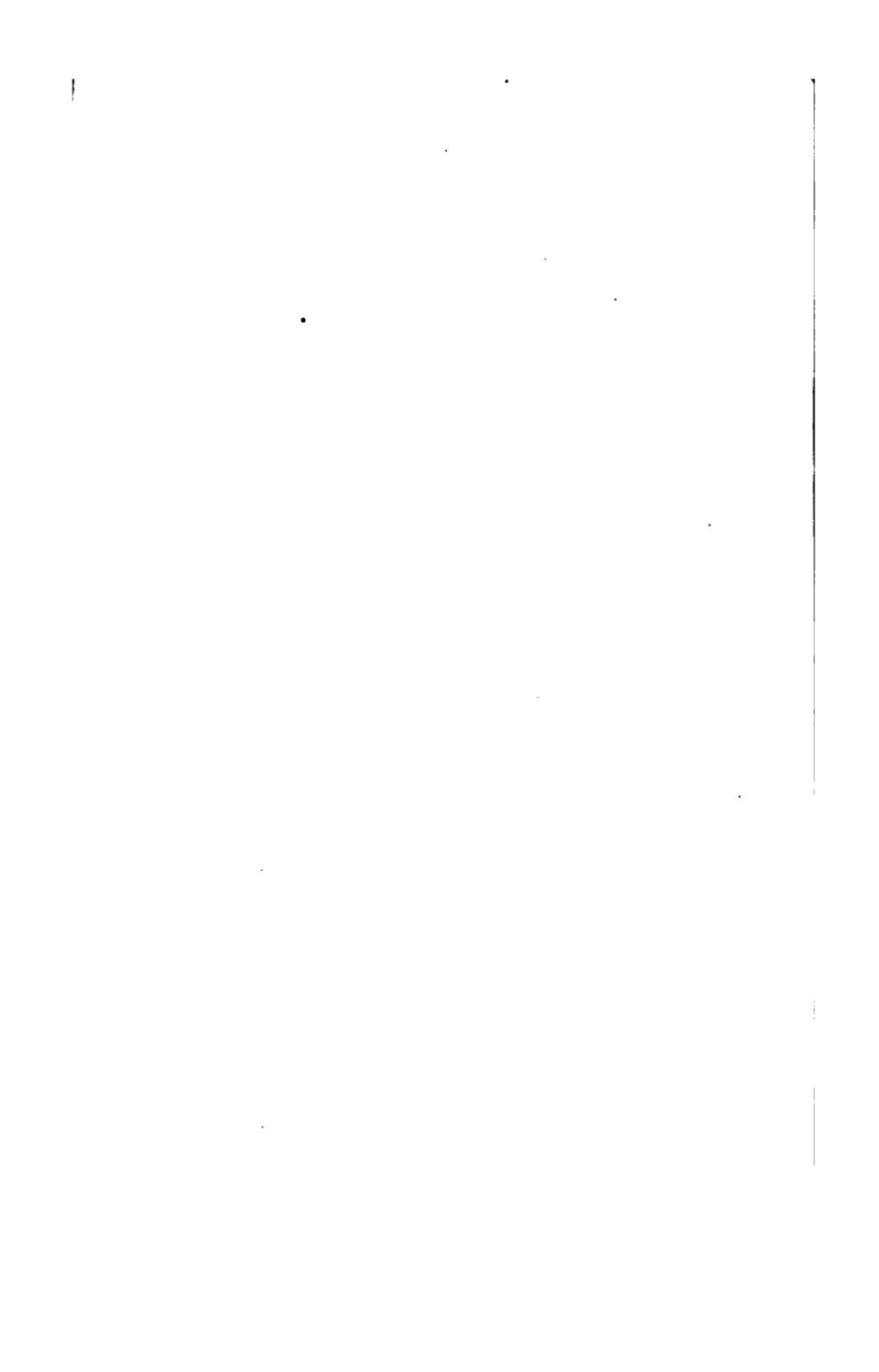
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## ELIJAH.

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### LECTURE I.

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#### CHERITH.

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ST. JAMES, v., 17.

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

IT was about sixty years after the secession of the ten tribes, that Ahab ascended the throne of Israel. Inaugurated as the kingdom of Israel had been by the establishment of a worship which, though not avowedly opposed to the worship of Jehovah, really stood to it in a relation at once thoroughly schismatical and grossly corrupt, it was the

natural sequel to such a beginning that religious and moral degeneracy should proceed with the utmost rapidity. In Omri, the father of Ahab, a fourth dynasty was called to rule over the distracted realm; and quick as was the succession of monarchs, it was quite kept pace with by the advancing strides of iniquity and idolatry. The king "who made Israel to sin" is the distinctive designation of him who stands at the head of the royal catalogue as the rebellious founder of the separate monarchy. Nadab, his son Baasha, *his* son Elah, and Zimri, each succeed to a like preeminence in wickedness as well as in power. The record of Omri, who followed Zimri, is, that "he wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all who were before him:" and his son Ahab's improves upon his again, for of him, too, it is written that "he did evil in the sight of the Lord above all

that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal, in the house of Baal which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all the kings of Israel that were before him."

It is among the many proofs which the Old Testament history supplies of the forbearance and long-suffering of God, that a people which, so far as they were represented by their king, had thus cast off their allegiance to Him, should nevertheless have continued to engage His fatherly care. Their deliberate act in renouncing their fealty to the house of His servant David, and cutting them-

selves off from the communion of His Church; their impious degradation of Him into “the similitude of a calf that eateth hay;” the contempt with which the priestly office was treated amongst them by its being supplied from “the lowest of the people;” His own gradual displacement, even in the form of calf worship, before Baal and Ashtoreth, the gods of the neighbouring heathen; and the crowning guilt of their king in forming a heathen alliance, and so strengthening the cause of those false deities—even these accumulated provocations could not drive the Lord God to forget that they were the posterity of His servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or blind Him, so to say, to the fact that, in the midst of this deep and wide-spread corruption, there were some knees that would not bow to Baal, and some eyes that would not look at the golden idols in Bethel and in Dan in

any other light than as indignities offered to the Most High. Severe as is the treatment with which the Lord God visits the national sins, it is treatment in which we can trace a purpose of mercy; it is chastisement designed, not for vengeance, but to awaken and amend.

On the eastern side of Jordan, between Bashan on the north, and Moab and Ammon on the south, and running eastward into the Arabian table-land, lay a wild, but far from barren, mountain region, which took its name of "Gilead" from the rocky heights which terminate its rich, undulating pastures, or look down upon its well-wooded ravines. The luxuriant herbage of its downs, the shade supplied by its central forests, and the unfailing waters of its streams, drew to this region the two chief cattle-feeding tribes of the chosen race—Reuben and Gad—who, having it as-

signed to them for their portion, occupied it as nomads, living in tents, and shifting from pasture to pasture, as need or inclination led them.\*

A son of Ishmael (as it has been conjectured)† had found his way into one of these shepherd hordes, attracted perhaps by what he had learnt of the true God, through the traditions inherited from their father Abraham, which the Ishmaelites are said to have retained longer than other heathens. Whether by the word of the Lord coming direct to him in his highland haunts, or by tidings being brought him by true servants of God, who fled to those wilds either to be out of reach of persecution, or in sheer abhorrence of the impieties and impurities they must witness if they remained in the cities of Israel—in some such way or other, the spirit of this

\* See "Smith's Dictionary of the Bible," art. "Gilead."

† See "Keil's Commentary on Kings."

sojourner in Gilead was deeply moved within him, and he felt himself summoned to bear his testimony for the living God to the very capital of the Israelitish monarchy; yes! and to the very face of the Israelitish king. More than anticipating the call of the Gentiles, he, a Gentile, resolves to be himself the caller instead of the called—the caller of the true seed of Abraham (he himself belonging to the rejected seed), to remember their privileges, and be ashamed of their ungrateful and impious abuse of them.

From what St. James says in the text, we may suppose that, by inspiration from above, the sojourner in Gilead divined in what way it would be best that the case should be dealt with. He was guided to believe that his own protests and expostulations would be of no effect, unless supported by some signal and unmistakable manifestation of Divine power and Divine wrath. It was

suggested to his thoughts of what kind that manifestation might most fitly be; and grasping the idea, he laid it before the Lord in prayer, with such result as emboldened him to set out, probably quite alone, upon his extraordinary enterprise.

If the name of “Elijah” signifies one who has God for his strength, we may now use it, with a sense of its entire appropriateness, of him who is to be the subject of our contemplations during the present Lent. If the designation, “prophet,” describes one who, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, not only foretells the future, nearer or more remote, but also interprets and declares the mind of God in instructing, exhorting, reproving, encouraging, threatening, and promising, our Ishmaelite from Gilead may henceforth claim of us that designation, with as valid a title to it as any one of the goodly fellowship, from Isaiah to Malachi.

The first appearance of Elijah in the sacred page is such as affords scope for, while it tempts, the freest indulgence of the imagination. It cannot fail to remind us of the significance which is attributed in the Epistle to the Hebrews to the absence of any genealogical addition to the name of Melchisedec. “And Elijah the Tishbite”—in our ignorance of the true meaning of this word “Tishbite,” I shall pass it over without comment—“Elijah the Tishbite, which was of the inhabitants of Gilead”—“without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life”\*—“said unto Ahab, ‘As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand’—stand habitually in prayer, and as a servant waiting his master’s bidding—“there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.”

Was this the first communication that

\* Heb., vii., 3. Chrysostom speaks of him as *μηδέπω καὶ νῦν τετελευκώς*.

the speaker had ever had with the weak and wicked king? or was it the climax of many previous expostulations? What was the scene, and what were the circumstances of the interview? Did it take place, like that of "the man of God from Judah" with Jeroboam, upon a public occasion? while Ahab was assisting in idolatrous rites? Or did the prophet make his way into the king's presence when the latter was alone? Standing before him, like an apparition—the tall, athletic frame, girt with the leathern girdle or apron, and the short, sheepskin cloak (probably its only other covering) tied rudely on the shoulders—the whole figure, fresh from the wilderness, in strange contrast with those ordinarily met with in kings' houses—did he speak abruptly, indeed, and briefly, as the sacred historian seems to represent, but with the awakening effect that heaven-prompted words, however few, will some-

times have upon a slumbering conscience?

Bad man as Ahab was, there appear in him, occasionally, some traces of a lingering sense of right, traces which, combined with his evil acts, indicate, as much as anything else, the weakness so universally ascribed to him. And to this the threat of the prophet may have struck home, without need of greater explicitness. In an instant, or after time given him for reflection, he may have drawn the inference, "If the Lord God of Israel does purpose to send us this visitation, it is because of the provocations with which we are provoking Him by our idolatries and our vices." He is not unlikely to have been acquainted with what was written again and again in the Books of Moses, and to have had it recalled to him, with as much force as a heart so hardened by sin admitted of its exerting upon him. I refer to such

warnings as these. “ And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn and thy wine and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods and worship them; and then the Lord’s wrath be kindled against you, and He shut up the Heaven, and there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you.”\*

The threat pronounced, and the mis-

\* Deut., xi., 13—17.

sion, so far, fulfilled, the prophet must withdraw himself from the presence and reach of Ahab. He had asserted that it rested with him (of course, as the agent and representative of Jehovah) to give or to withhold the moisture, the want of which would be speedily felt. Either, therefore, in his blind rage, Ahab—or rather Jezebel, instigating her ductile husband—would seek his life in revenge for the evil of which he had been the instrument; or, like Pharaoh, they would be moved to require his interposition with God, only, as in Pharaoh's case, to the greater hardening of their hearts, and the consequent accumulation of plague after plague upon themselves and their people. “The word of the Lord,” therefore, “came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.”

Wherever this retreat may have been,

it was one of the most perfect secrecy and solitude. Water was all that it would supply for the prophet's support. His food, God promised, should be brought him by the fowls of the air.

I need not say that the word of the Lord was promptly and unhesitatingly obeyed by Elijah; nor can we doubt that in this retirement he fed his soul with closer and deeper communings with his God—that his constancy was at once tried and confirmed—that he learned the lesson of serving God by patience, a lesson harder often to master than that of serving Him by activity—and that his faith in his divine commission was thoroughly established by the miracle which, day by day, was punctually repeated in his behalf. “The ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook.”

After some time spent in this lonely

hiding-place, he begins to perceive tokens that the curse which he had pronounced is really working. The torrent that for many a month had brawled through the ravine in which he lay concealed, is seen gradually to shrink into smaller dimensions and to run with a feebler flow, and does less and less to break with its music the oppressive silence of the sultry and cloudless day. Thus he appreciates the power of "the word of the Lord" in his own mouth; thus he estimates the mighty efficacy of his own believing prayer. He had prayed that it might not rain; he had foretold that it would not rain; and now the dry, bleached rocks and pebbles in the bed of Cherith, testify to him that it is done according to his prayer and his prediction.

And may not the thought have occurred to his mind—at any rate it may well be entertained here by us, my brethren—that here was an illustration at

once of the insufficiency of nature, and of the sufficiency of God? It is not the sustenance that the ravens bring to him day by day, against their nature—against their natural fear of man, and against their natural voracity—it is not this that fails Elijah; but it is the brook that, so long as it had supplied him, had supplied him in, what we call, the ordinary course of nature—in simple obedience to those general laws of Divine providence which work alike for all, without respect to their righteousness or their unrighteousness, to their discerning or not discerning the hand of God in what is either given or denied.

So viewed, the incident may recall to us the words which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ addressed to the woman of Samaria, at Jacob's well. “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him

a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Yes! dear brethren, the refreshments which we derive from sources which are of this world only, "of the earth earthy," may be indeed accessible to the very last, so that ever as (according to Christ's word) our thirst recurs, the means of slaking it may be at hand. But for all that the curse is working towards its accomplishment, the curse that "the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up," its wells be dried and its Cheriths wasted; and then the thirst recurring, wherewith shall it be slaked?

And as the part of his daily sustenance which failed Elijah was that for which he was obliged to look down and stoop to earth, so what did not fail him was that for which he lifted up his eyes, and which was brought him as from heaven. So shall it be with us. Not only with reference to the comforts and refresh-

ments of God's Holy Spirit, whether those which we receive through the ordinances and means of grace, or those which may be imparted to us more immediately by the operation of the Divine Agent upon our understanding and our affections; but also in regard to our earthly and temporal blessings, the way to give them permanence, to make them to be blessings indeed, is, when we want them, to seek them at God's hands, and when we receive them to receive them as given us by Him. In this way our common food will acquire for us something of a sacramental virtue, and become a part of that spiritual sustenance of which Jesus said, "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die.....If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever.....He that eateth me even he shall live by me. . This is that bread which came down from heaven; not as

your fathers did eat manna and are dead : he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever." It is true that our Lord here speaks of the permanence of the effect, while the point before us is rather the inexhaustible constancy of the supply. But they are, in fact, one and the same thing, or at least correlatives. As he that drinks of the heavenly water shall never thirst, because he shall have within him an eternal well-spring ; so he that eats of the heavenly food shall never hunger, because the sense of want shall ever be anticipated by the provision of endless satisfaction which his soul has in Christ dwelling in him by faith.

And with our Lord's admonition before us to " consider the ravens," may we not, ought we not to pause a few minutes and reflect whether there is any lesson we may learn from them in their present employment ? " God feedeth them," says Jesus, as the Psalmist before had said,

“He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens that cry.” God had fed them; and now we see them, in obedience to His word, conquering their instincts of fear and appetite, and repaying, so to say, the nurture they had received from God, by ministering to the wants of God’s representative. With this example (for such the teaching of Christ justifies me in calling it) before us, let us put to ourselves the question of Jesus, “Are ye not much better than they?” Are ye not, in every way, better cared for? Are ye not the objects of a nobler provision? of a nearer, deeper, and more tender love? Nay, and are ye not “better than they,” inasmuch as ye have capacities for recognizing duty, where they can only yield to constraint; inasmuch as ye have hearts to be moved by sympathy, where they can only be guided, as it were, mechanically; ye, in acts of beneficence, do but listen to the prompt-

ings of nature, as well as to the bidding of God, while they, as has been already said, went against their nature to fulfil His will, and that, not once only, but again and again.

Better then, dear brethren, as we are than they in motives, in powers, in opportunities, in everything that can or ought to lead to good deeds; shall we not also show ourselves better, infinitely better, in doing such deeds? Shall not we, too, at the bidding of our God, and in behalf of those whom He, in Christ, has taught us to recognise as His representatives upon earth, the poor and the suffering—shall not we conquer natural repugnances, deny self, control appetite, mortify the flesh, and, at this season in particular, remember the question of the prophet, “Is not this the fast that I have chosen.....to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou

seest the naked that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

To return for a few minutes to Elijah. The drought, as we have learnt from our text, had fallen upon the land of Israel in answer to his prayer; and hence we may conclude, though the sacred narrative does not specifically state it, that his morning and evening supplies were the subject of prayer also—of prayer that they might be duly sent, and of thanksgiving when they were sent. It is true that God had promised them, and hence a false reasoning might have concluded that there was no need to ask them. But a sober and intelligent faith will always understand the promises of God conditionally, and will use them as encouragements, not to dispense with, but to employ with greater earnestness and diligence those means to the use of

which is ordinarily attached, by the known laws of God's spiritual government, the enjoyment of heavenly blessings.

But it would be an injustice to the character of Elijah if we were to suppose that supplication for bodily sustenance occupied a chief place in his approaches to God. "A man of like passions with us," he was not insensible to the body's wants. Though he could endure hardness, he could also feel it; though he did not shrink from privation, it was privation to him. I am not looking at the bodily trials he must have encountered in the glen of the Cherith, as contrasted with the abundance and the comforts of lives like our own. I know that the rugged Ishmaelite, inured to hardship and familiar with precariousness, would make light of much that we should find intolerable, and would despise as useless the great majority of those things which

we reckon among necessaries. But for all that the utter loneliness, if not the lodging and the fare, of his retreat, must have driven him, so to say, for support, even if it had not been matter of choice with him so to seek it, in communion with his God. He "was a man subject to like passions as we are," and therefore did he pray, pray without ceasing, lest the infirmity of the flesh should fail under the searching ordeal and the severe discipline which he was now called upon to undergo.

And it is worth our serious consideration, brethren, what great use the Lord God has made of retirement, in some instances of absolute solitude, in preparing the chief of His servants for the work which He has given them to do. Moses in the Mount, the Baptist in the wilderness of Judæa, St. Paul perhaps in Arabia, and St. John in Patmos, will occur to you as, together with Elijah,

partakers of the discipline to which, as at this season, the Lord Jesus Christ submitted Himself, that so, for our sakes, He might fulfil all the conditions by which humanity is perfected. And though we well know, all of us, that God does not reckon us amongst the chief of His servants, we trust and believe, except we be reprobate, that He does reckon us amongst His servants; and if so, we cannot but conclude that, according to our measure, a like discipline is profitable for us to that which was so blessed in the cases I have referred to. The Church urges this thought upon us at the present season. Leaving each one to determine for himself, with a judgment duly enlightened by prayer and meditation, in what his imitation of Christ must consist, and to what point it must be carried, she calls upon us, in general terms, to come apart with Him into the desert awhile, and

deny ourselves, and be with the wild beasts in contemplation of, and in contest with, our bad passions and our sins.

And in enforcing this teaching of the Church (as it is the duty of her ministers now to do) I will but say that, whatever we may judge Lenten retirement to consist in, it cannot be found in what we commonly understand by society; whatever we may hold of Lenten abstinence, it cannot, at any rate, be compatible with festivities and gaieties, or with public spectacles and entertainments. In the house of God we may seek a retreat from the crowd in which it is our lot to live. Here, morning and evening, we may daily ask, and, if we have faith, we shall daily receive food and sustenance from heaven. Here we may daily resort to a fountain that will never fail; for it is to His Church, her temples, and her ordinances, that the Lord God has given His sure promise, "All my fresh springs

shall be in thee." Here God's winged messengers will feed us. Angels' food, the food which angels minister, and by which they themselves live, will be supplied us—even the power to do the will of God, as angels do it, and to complete the portion He assigns to us of His work, in the world, in the Church, and in our own souls.

## LECTURE II.

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### ZAREPHATH.

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ST. LUKE, iv., 25, 26.

I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land. But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.

THE city of Sarepta is identified by modern travellers with a village called *Surafend*, which is “seated aloft on the top and side of one of the hills, the long line of which skirts the plain of Phœnicia.”\* It was situated about midway between the then great commercial seaports of Tyre and Sidon; and, therefore,

\* Stanley, “Sinai and Palestine,” p. 271.

in the midst of a country in which the worship of Baal had its principal home at the period with which we are now concerned. Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, King of Israel, was the daughter of Eth-baal, a priest of Ashtoreth, who, by murder and usurpation, had obtained possession of what we may call the Tyro-Sidonian kingdom. The worship of Ashtoreth was (as I need hardly tell you) a kindred worship to that of Baal; Baal being, in fact, the supreme male divinity, and Ashtoreth, or Astarte, the supreme female divinity of the same system.

Had he had, therefore, to choose for himself whither he should flee, when the drying up of the Cherith drove him from the retreat in which we left him last Friday, Sarepta—or, as it is called in the Old Testament, Zarephath—is probably one of the last places which Elijah would have chosen; for it was a very different thing to dwell amongst a people utterly

given over to idolatry and immorality, to what it was to discharge a mission of rebuke and warning to one whose religion was still only in process of corruption. In the latter case, there would be ground to work upon; in the former, none: so that a man like Elijah, though he might be safe in the centre of Phoenicia, because it would be the merest folly in him to oppose what was held and done there quite universally, and without the least misgiving in any quarter, would be exposed to the sore trial of eating his own heart in inaction and silence, when he had ten thousand times rather brave any amount of danger in witnessing for the Lord his God, against a nation in whose conscience there must still be vulnerable points, if only he could find and hit them.

And if his faith in regard to provision for his temporal wants needed any trial, it might, perhaps, be found in the consi-

deration, from what source it was that he was directed to look for his future sustenance. He set out for Zarephath, to throw himself upon the hospitality, or indeed upon the charity, of one of a class of persons who are often chosen as the very emblems of helplessness and poverty. "I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."

Approaching the city gate, he thought he recognised her whom God had thus appointed to be his entertainer; but it was under circumstances that would have been anything but promising, if he had seen as man commonly sees in such matters. In a season of dearth, when even the well-to-do were probably beginning to feel the pressure of the prevailing scarcity, the sight of a widow woman, so poor as to be gathering sticks outside the city walls, would offer him little prospect of the assistance he stood in need of. Possibly with some such feeling as this, some

feeling of doubt whether this really could be the widow who was to receive him; or else in order that he might not alarm her by breaking to her all at once the extent of the boon he came to seek of her, Elijah first of all addresses her with the simple request that she will fetch him a draught of water. Seeing her promptitude in complying with this, as she turned to do his errand, he called after her, and said:

“ Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.”

If before he had had any doubts whether this were indeed the hostess destined for him by God, the poor woman’s reply to his second request must at once have satisfied him upon the point.

“ As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and behold I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me

and my son, that we may eat it and die."

Looked at, indeed, from a worldly point of view, these words would but confirm the impression that this was not the quarter, this in which temporal desititution had reached its last extremity, whence to expect more than the merest personal kindness and sympathy. But that adjuration, "As the Lord thy God liveth!" is enough to convince Elijah that his first impression was right, that he has found the person in search of whom he had come to Zarephath, and that he may, therefore, at once give her the assurance which he now knows her to be qualified to receive.

"Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the

cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

"And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah."

Some have supposed that this woman was by birth an Israelite, but had been married to a Phœnician husband; and in this way they account for the knowledge of the true God, which the adjuration just referred to shows that she possessed. Our Lord's words, however, in the text, though they may not be conclusive upon the point, certainly seem to favour the belief that she was of a heathen race, as well as the inhabitant of a heathen city—a heathen who, in some way or another, had been brought (like Elijah himself) to the knowledge and faith of Jehovah; and in communing with whom, therefore, Elijah might receive, as well as impart, encouragement to hold fast that knowledge and that faith in all difficulties and all dangers. That he was sent expressly

to impart it is plain from what Christ has told us. That in imparting, he might himself receive, is consistent with all our experience concerning spiritual blessings. “If the Lord had preserved even among the heathen true confessors of His name,” the inference in the prophet’s mind would naturally be that “his work in Israel would not be altogether in vain.” \* And if, bold and energetic as he was in action, he was, perchance, deficient in the more feminine virtues of quietness and patience, he might learn them here, beneath this widow’s roof, from the daily example of her who sat humbly at his feet as a disciple.

Let me pause here for a few moments to pay a tribute, which many who hear me know and will readily acknowledge to be deserved. The widow, feeding the travel-worn prophet with her last handful of meal and her last drops of oil, when

\* Keil.

death, from want, is staring her and her boy in the face, is an example which has its imitators every day amongst our own humbler class. Few, who have not witnessed it, would be disposed to believe how much self-denial and how much trust in a benevolent Providence the poor constantly exercise in bearing one another's burthens, and in doing acts of kindness and charity to their neighbours. Instances could be given by clergy, by Scripture readers, by district visitors, and by all others who are acquainted with the habits of the poor, of sacrifices made by them for the assistance of their distressed fellow-creatures, which, if measured by a just measure, would be estimated more highly than many works that challenge and win from the world the praise of extraordinary munificence. From the fetching of the cup of cold water, the symbol of personal trouble involving no pecuniary cost, to the little cake that could not be

made without exhausting the last supplies upon which any certain dependence could be placed, the whole range of beneficence is daily and hourly compassed by those, of the scantiness and precariousness of whose means of subsistence we cannot even think without pain, and without wondering (as we say) "how ever they contrive to live."

And let it not be supposed to detract at all from the credit of the widow's hospitality that the Lord (as He tells Elijah) had commanded her to exercise it. Who is there amongst us, dear brethren, whom the Lord has not commanded, whom He is not continually commanding, to do like deeds of faith and love, of faith working by love? If the word of the Lord came to her in a different manner from that in which it comes to us, the difference, we may believe, was only such as was due to her peculiar circumstances. With the

advantages we possess for receiving and acting upon the Divine will, we have no right to expect it to be declared to us in the same extraordinary way as when it had to be communicated to the heathen-born woman, poor and uninstructed, the only person capable of receiving it at all in a city wholly given to idolatry. In effect, though not in form, the will of God is, I believe, as distinctly and emphatically made known to us every day we live, and in a variety of matters, as it was to the widow of Zarephath upon the subject of entertaining the Lord's prophet: and the praise of her obedience is, I believe, as great as any we should deserve, for what might be called the spontaneous performance of the greatest act of Christian benevolence, that lies in our power to perform.

With this poor woman, then, and her child, probably her only one, the prophet took up his abode, waiting the

time when God should summon him to action; and day after day the promised miracle was wrought for the support of that humble and unnoticed household.

After a time, however, God, who ever suits His discipline to the wants of His children's souls, sees that the daily recurrence of His bounty is producing upon the widow's mind an effect, whether of self-complacency, of over-confidence, or of forgetfulness of Him, which needs to be corrected by the visitation of affliction. "In my prosperity I said I shall never be removed; thou Lord of Thy goodness hast made my hill so strong." Some such feeling as that which is thus expressed by the Psalmist, may have begun to creep into her heart; or God may have seen that her soul was now ripe for another step in its heavenward progress, and that she was qualified to learn the lesson that His

favour is no security against temporal loss or suffering; nay, that it may even bring them with it.—may be, in fact, the fruit and evidence of it. Her son, in whom we may suppose that her chief earthly happiness was centred, “fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him,” *i.e.*, that he died.\* In the agony and bewilderment of her grief, she can see nothing but the Divine wrath in this visitation, and in Elijah only the instrument of that wrath. But still, in the passionate outburst of her sorrow, there shows itself a true feeling, though greatly mixed up with error, and requiring to be purified and directed. The consciousness of sin comes strongly upon her, as, for the most part, it should do upon God’s

\* Upon this, as upon some other points, I dissent from the spirited and picturesque article on Elijah, in Smith’s “Dictionary of the Bible;” by which, however, I have been much assisted in the composition of these Lectures.

children in the hour of their chastisement; but she cannot go on to endure patiently, and still less to welcome, the agency which she conceives God to have employed for His chastening.

“What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?”

Those of us who can the most clearly discern the love of God in His scourgings, must know too well how hard it is to kiss the rod, to blame or to wonder at this widow's shrinking from the sight of Elijah, when she fancied (though too superstitiously) that he had been, in some way, the means of her bereavement. That it was but a passing aberration, however, may be gathered from the readiness with which she allows the supposed destroyer to take away from her the lifeless form which she held clasped to her bosom, and to

carry it to the loft in which he had his lodging.

Here, laying the body upon his own bed, he addresses to God the seemingly reproachful question,

“ O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?”

The words, however, are probably not so much words of remonstrance with God as of humble reference on the part of the prophet to the poor mother’s notion that, but for his visit, this terrible calamity would not have befallen her. “ Can it indeed be” (they would seem to say) “ that, through any fault of mine, the house in which I sojourn is thus visited? If so it be, O Lord my God, let my prayers undo the evil which my presence has occasioned, and let this child’s soul come into him again.” The prayer is accompanied by the action, thrice repeated, of stretching his body

upon that of the boy, and then is heard by the Lord of life and death, who bids back the soul into the child again, and the revival is complete.

The dreadful suspense which the mother had been enduring while the prophet was shut up in his chamber with the remains of her child—the minutes that seemed hours in his absence—the ear strained to catch every sound that came from that upper room—Elijah's thankful joy when the flush of returning life reddened the marble cheeks and livid lips, and the glazed eyes were again lighted with intelligence—and the burst of rapture, the tears of speechless delight with which the astonished child, awaking as from a deep sleep, was pressed warm and responsive to that bosom from which but now he had been taken a corpse—all this, brethren, it needs no great effort of imagination to picture to ourselves—no trick of elocu-

tion to make us understand the thrilling effect of the prophet's triumphant announcement, "See, thy son liveth!" We feel sensible too, that the sacred narrative records but the simple truth, a result of the precise kind which we should have expected from the miracle, when it relates how the woman said unto Elijah,

"Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the Word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

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By this miracle (as it has been observed) Elijah proved himself the forerunner and the type of Him who is the raiser of all the dead;\* but it has also been remarked, and it is a remark which, familiar as it may be to many of you, ought not to pass unnoticed in this connection, that there is a contrast between the manner in which Elijah works his miracle, and that in which Christ wrought

\* Keil.

His of the same class, which marks the relative position of the one to the other—that, namely, of the servant to the Master. The great French preacher, Massillon,\* describes this contrast thus: “True, Elijah raises the dead; but he is obliged to lay himself again and again upon the corpse of the child whom he resuscitates. There is an effort and a vehemence† in his proceedings which show plainly that he invokes a power not his own—that he recalls from the dominion of death a soul which is not really subjected to his word—that he is not himself the Lord of life and death. Jesus Christ raises the dead, as He does the most ordinary actions. He speaks as a master to those who are wrapt in an eternal sleep; and we well understand that He is the God of the dead as well as of the living, never more calm and

\* Quoted by Trench on the Miracles.

† The original is, “il souffle, il se retrécit, il s’agite.”

serene than when He is working the greatest wonders."

Deep must have been the impression made upon the prophet's own mind by the miracle which he had thus been permitted to perform, or rather (as he himself would regard it) which God had thus wrought through his agency. He was on the eve of being summoned to the active fulfilment of his momentous task. A king, a court, a priesthood, a nation dead in sin—rendered by idolatry and vice insensible to every effort to awaken the conscience, and recall the better self to life—upon such materials it was that he would have to work; and well might he sometimes be tempted, despite his intense enthusiasm, to look back wistfully upon his peaceful shepherd life in Gilead, and to contemplate the abandonment of his enterprise as altogether wild and hopeless. And whenever the sense of overwhelming difficulty

thus oppressed him, how emphatically would it be rebuked by the remembrance that, besides being fed by miracle at the Cherith and in Zarephath, he had, by the power of God, and in answer to his fervent and believing prayer, been enabled to accomplish that proverbially impossible thing, that thing which none had ever accomplished before him, the raising the dead to life.

We shall hereafter have to contemplate him engaged in a way that called for the most unbending sternness, and indeed the most ruthless severity; and it is as though God, preparatory to those duties, would have him pause a while, and cultivate the tenderer feelings of the heart, that so he might not be hardened by the coming task—it is (I say) as though He would thus graciously guard his servant against the loss or deterioration of the most essential element in the godly character, that of love, that the Lord con-

fines Elijah for a season to a narrow sphere of purely domestic life, and in that sphere affords exercise for his warmest sympathies, brings him into contact with one of the acutest and deepest of human sorrows, that of a mother for the loss of her child.

The spirit in which he was to go forth to testify for God to an idolatrous and sinful generation, was (as I have just intimated) a spirit of extreme sternness and severity. Reproof, rebuke and warning were to be the constant burthen of his lips, punishment the most unrelenting was to be inflicted at his bidding, and indeed by his own hands. Might he not then be naturally led to draw the general inference, that such was the temper and such were the means by which men could best be kept in, or recalled to their allegiance to God? Might he not lose sight of the fact, that the circumstances with which he had to deal, were peculiar and excep-

tional, and imagine that threatening, denunciation, chastisement, were the representations of the ordinary attitude of the mind of God towards the children of men? To put the point quite generally, might he not conclude that the truth required to be upheld by persecution, and propagated by violence, instead of commended by words of persuasion, and feelings and deeds of charity?

And if such were the danger to which his mission exposed him, how valuable to him, in his seasons of reflection, would be the lesson he had learnt in the widow's cottage at Zarephath. There he had had the opportunity of observing, in direct contrast, the spiritual effects severally of judgment and of mercy. When the distracted mother seems to perceive that the scourge of God's messenger is laid upon her because of her sins, her impulse is one of anxiety to be rid of his presence. "What have I to do with

thee, O thou man of God?" But, on the other hand, when mercy is extended to her—when, no less sensible than before, that she had deserved chastisement, she sees in the restoration of her child to her, the proof that her sin is remembered no more—and when the man of God stands before her, no longer as an instrument of wrath, but as a minister of love—when he speaks to her with a voice that thrills her with the magic tones of sympathy, "See, thy son liveth!" then has the Spirit of God His perfect work in her soul—then does she apprehend the true character of the prophet, and the true import of his teaching, and exclaim, "Now, by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the Word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

And hence the widow and her son may have been perpetually present to the memory of Elijah, admonishing him that, though it pleased Almighty God to make

use of him for His own righteous purposes of vengeance, it must only be distinctly as an instrument in God's hands, and not in the exercise of his own discretion, or in obedience to the impulses of his own heart, that he must venture to wield the weapons of destruction. Whilst he was required by God to be, on His behalf, the executant of the spirit of the law, recollections of Zarephath would preach to him, and keep alive in him, the milder temper of the Gospel. They would teach him a lesson he must have much needed—the lesson that when left to himself, controlled by no superhuman influence, and directed by no Divine communication, love must be ever the guiding star of his course as a minister of heavenly truth; that if he saw it necessary to wound, it must always be with the healing wound of the surgeon's knife; and that though God, the Judge of all, might bid him (and he must do

it) smite to destroy, he himself, in the interpretation of his commission, must chastise, if at all, only in such wise as was calculated to amend and to save.

## LECTURE III.

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### CARMEL.

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ST. JAMES, v., 18.

And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain.....

DURING the time that Elijah lay concealed in the torrent-bed of the Cherith and in Zarephath, Ahab's search for him had been unremitting. Far and wide he had prosecuted it, and with increasing energy, as the terrible visitation, of year after year of drought, pressed upon the land with increasing severity. He had gone so far as even to send ambassadors to distant countries, calling upon their kings to have their territory explored for the fugitive, and if he was not found, at

any rate, to return the most solemn assurances that they had done their utmost to discover him. Roused to fury by the repeated failure of these attempts, and at the same time hoping, perhaps, to draw him forth from his hiding-place and bring him to terms, Jezebel had set on foot a relentless persecution against the whole body of the prophets of Jehovah. They had been slain, not one here and there, but in large numbers; and a hundred of them—fifty during one massacre and fifty during another—had escaped only by a God-fearing man, Obadiah, the confidential steward of the king's household, concealing them in a cave, and supplying them with the means of sustaining life until they could flee out of reach of the exasperated queen. All, however, was in vain. It was God's will that Elijah should not be discovered; and from the elevation on which Zarephath was built, he may have watched the

sails that bore, from or to the port of Tyre or of Sidon, the messengers whom Ahab sent across the sea in search of him.

And now the effects of the drought had reached that extremity, that the king could not procure fodder for his own stables. Mistrusting the representations made to him of the total destruction of all herbage, he divides the land into two districts, of which he takes one for himself, and assigns the other to Obadiah, with a view to their visiting, between them, every fountain and stream—it being near to these, if anywhere, that grass would be found. They set out from Jezreel (Ahab's summer residence) in different directions, and Obadiah had gone, it would seem, but a short distance when he was met in his road by an object which was, probably, the very last he would have expected to encounter. The same tall, athletic figure as, three years and a half

ago, had presented itself before Ahab to predict the drought, now, wearing the same leathern apron and sheep-skin cloak, startles Obadiah with its sudden and unaccountable appearance. He recognises the form which, servant as he was of the same God, would not, having been once seen, easily be obliterated from his memory; and prostrating himself upon the ground, he asks, seemingly with some doubt whether it was indeed a substantial reality that he beheld or only an apparition, "Art thou that my lord, Elijah?" "I am," is the reply; and it is followed by the command, "Go, tell thy lord, Behold Elijah is here."

Remembering how the prophet had vanished from Samaria, and how he had escaped the rigorous search that had been made for him; and seeing how he had now started up, as if from the earth, in the very midst of a land in which there was scarcely an eye but had been looking

for him with a vigilance quickened by the scourge of famine, Obadiah shrinks from complying with this command, lest, as he says to Elijah,

“As soon as I am gone from thee, the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me.”

He entreats, therefore, that this demand may not be insisted upon, representing it as virtually a punishment suitable for an enemy of the Lord and His servants; whereas he, as he shows, though serving an apostate master, had never been unfaithful to Jehovah, and had availed himself of his position to aid the escape of no less than a hundred of His prophets from slaughter. Has he then merited that he shall be thus required to become the instrument of his own destruction? Elijah removes his apprehensions with the solemn assurance that,

if he will go and fetch the king, he will be forthcoming that very day. Without further hesitation, Obadiah hastens upon his errand, overtakes Ahab, communicates to him what has happened, and brings him towards the spot where he had left the prophet.

“Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” is Ahab’s exclamation, when he is confronted by Elijah fearlessly advancing to meet him. Undismayed by the menacing tone of this question, with a dignity, and a consciousness of Divine support, which overawed the weak and irresolute monarch, the prophet sternly retorts:

“I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.” And then, turning to account the advantage which he had gained over the conscience-stricken king by this intrepid rebuke, he demands a meeting with the prophets

of Baal and of Ashtoreth, in the sight of all Israel, upon Mount Carmel.

If it were fear that caused Ahab to assent to this demand in the first instance, after-reflection and consultation with Jezebel, may have led him to congratulate himself upon it, as being likely to afford him the opportunity of inflicting a signal vengeance upon Elijah. At any rate, whatever were the feelings of Ahab, we may believe that some such consideration prevailed with Jezebel to induce her to acquiesce in the fulfilment of her husband's engagement, although she does not appear to have suffered her own especial *protégés*, the four hundred prophets of Ashtoreth, to accept the challenge in which they were included with the prophets of Baal.

The royal proclamation, therefore, went forth throughout the land, summoning all Israel to assemble on a certain day at

Mount Carmel. Tradition has marked with unusual trustworthiness, the scene of the incidents which I have now to relate to you.

“ Carmel is not so much a mountain, as a ridge, or upland park, extending for many miles into the interior of the country. The eastern extremity, which is also the highest point of the whole ridge.....commands the last view of the sea behind and the first view of the great plain in front, just where the glades of forest, ‘ the excellency of Carmel,’ sink into the usual barrenness of the hills and vales of Palestine. There, on the highest point of the mountain, had stood, on its sacred ‘ high place,’ an altar of the Lord which Jezebel had cast down. Close beneath, on a wide upland sweep, under the shade of olives, and round a perennial well of water, which had escaped the general drought, were ranged, on one side the king and people, with

the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and on the other side the commanding figure of the prophet of the Lord," with a single companion, whom Jewish tradition identifies with the boy he had raised to life at Zarephath, and who is afterwards described in the narrative as his servant. "The city of Jezreel, with Ahab's summer palace and Jezebel's temple, were distinctly visible," though sixteen miles distant; "and in the nearer foreground, immediately under the base of the mountain, was clearly seen the winding stream of the Kishon, working its way through the narrow pass of the hills into the Bay, now known as the 'Bay of Acre.'" \*

It is to the people that Elijah addresses himself. Their sin was not that of abso-

\* Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," pp. 345-8. Some trifling liberties are taken with this extract, in order to harmonise its form with the narrative into which it is woven.

lute apostacy, but of a temporising endeavour to combine the service of Baal with that of Jehovah—a self-interested desire to stand well at once with the court and with their own conscience. As Solomon before had thought that he could unite the service of Jehovah with the worship of idols, so did they confound in one system the heterogeneous elements of two utterly incompatible religions,\* and flatter themselves, perhaps, that they were really serving the cause of Jehovah, by making Baal His ally, instead of, what he would else be, His enemy. This is the way in which even now Satan endeavours to recommend to God's people dangerous combinations and fatal compromises. Elijah calls it “halting between two opinions;” he reproaches the assembled multitude with its folly, and bids them now choose their cause, Jehovah's or Baal's, and having chosen, stand by it.

\* Keil.

The impression made by his appeal is such as, at least, to keep them silent. They make no attempt to justify their double-mindedness, still less do they declare for Baal, though he is represented there by power, by pomp and magnificence, and by numbers, while Jehovah's cause is wanting in all these supports, so imposing in a purely popular estimate. Elijah seizes upon the fact of this external inequality, and declares that he is ready, in spite of it, to stake the claims of the God whom he serves, upon the issue of a trial which he proceeds to propose. Let two bullocks be taken, and let the prophets of Baal choose one of them, and leave the other for him, and let everything be prepared by each party for a burnt sacrifice, only let no fire be brought near the altars. Let this be left to the deities themselves to supply. If one does supply it, and the other not, let him, whichever he be, Jehovah or Baal, be acknowledged as God.

Every advantage in this contest must be admitted by the adherents of Baal to be on their side. Their god was the sun-god, and who should be able to send down fire if not he?\* If any collusive trick were possible on either side, on which should it be but theirs, who numbered four hundred and fifty men, while the persecutions of Jezebel had not left in Israel one man who would stand by Elijah as a known and avowed prophet of the Lord.

It has been supposed either that, in accepting the trial, the prophets of Baal did rely upon being able to procure fire by some device or other, but that they were baffled by being closely watched by persons who, like Obadiah, were true to Jehovah in their hearts, though they

\* In this and the following paragraph, and occasionally elsewhere, I have incorporated the substance of some of the very useful notes in the Old Testament portion of "The Paragraph Bible" published by the Religious Tract Society.

dared not openly confess Him: or else, that though they knew they must fail, they had no doubt but Elijah would fail also, and so the injury done to their reputation and their influence would, at the utmost, be no greater than must be the consequence of their declining the challenge. But whatever may have been the case with some few of them—the most crafty and the most wicked, who knew very well that they were the teachers of falsehood and imposture—the great body of them were so completely the slaves of their superstition, that they really expected a triumph, and were thrown into greater and greater excitement as the day wore on, and the sun blazed down upon them more and more fiercely, and yet “there was no voice, nor any that answered” their reiterated cry, “O Baal, hear us!”

Elijah who, calm and confident, had hitherto watched their proceedings in

silence, now avails himself of a pause in their frantic dances round the altar, and in a tone, not of light raillery, but of severe sarcasm, bids them “cry aloud:” for though Baal is a god, there would be nothing inconsistent with their notion of a god in his being so engaged as to prevent his hearing them:

“Either he is talking,\* or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened.”

Stimulated by this taunt, “They cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.”

And so it went on, with the addition of the peculiar and highest degree of frenzy called “prophesying,” until they had exhausted all their efforts, and the hour of the evening sacrifice approaching,

\* “Meditating.” I have not thought it advisable to depart from the English version, except here and there, where it was important to do so.

there had been “neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.”

It was now Elijah’s turn to put his God to the test. That they might watch his proceedings most narrowly, and satisfy themselves that he practised no deception, he bids the multitude draw close around him. Emphatically of the great spiritual object which he has to accomplish, he does not erect a new altar, but repairs or restores that which had been thrown down; and this he does by employing “twelve stones,” in token that the separation of the chosen seed into two kingdoms is not recognized by God, before Whom the twelve tribes should form one covenant people, with one name of “Israel,” a name not to be appropriated by a part only, one worship of Jehovah, and one common opposition to idolatry. Round the altar he makes a trench, large enough to hold a considerable quantity of water; and when the

wood and the offering have been duly placed, he causes four buckets full of water from the neighbouring well to be poured over them three times in succession, so that they are completely saturated, and the water runs off into the trench and fills it.

And now while the sun's broad disc is sinking towards the waves,\* a symbol of the defeat which Baal is about to suffer, at the very hour when the evening sacrifice is being offered in the temple at Jerusalem, Elijah lifts up his hands to heaven, and offers this solemn prayer:

“Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that

\* The hour of evening sacrifice was originally sunset. Subsequently it was fixed at three hours after midday. At this period it was probably later than the latter, and earlier than the former hour. See Keil.

Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again."

The words were no sooner spoken, than "the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood, and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." The miracle was a repetition, but with additional incidents, of that by which the Lord had avouched His acceptance of Aaron's first sacrifice in the Tabernacle. As in that "Jehovah solemnly accredited the institution of the Mosaic ritual, so here he sanctioned, in a similar manner, the prophet's attempt to restore his worship" \* to its original purity. Similar too were the modes in which the people gave expression to the effect produced on their minds upon the two occasions. As in the former instance, "they shouted and fell on their faces," so on this, "they fell on their faces," exclaiming, "The Lord He is God! the Lord he is God!"

\* "Paragraph Bible." See also Keil.

Under the theocracy, the punishment appointed for idolatry was death. As an assertion, therefore, of the Divine authority, calculated to make a deep and lasting impression upon all who might still be tempted to set it at nought by following Baal, Elijah calls upon the people to seal their renunciation, by aiding him to execute the sentence of the Divine law upon those who were the representatives and instigators of that great sin. He himself taking the lead, they seize every man of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and dragging them down to the brook Kishon, fulfil the command of Moses, “If there arise among you a prophet,” and entice you to “go after other gods,” and “serve them” .....“that prophet shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way

which the Lord thy God commanded thee to walk in." (Deut., xiii., 1—5.) It is better to view the terrible act of Elisha in this light, than as a revengeful retaliation for Jezebel's massacres—better to consider it as designed to remind the king, with fearful emphasis, of a duty which he had neglected, than to punish the queen for the wickedness, monstrous as it was, of which she had been guilty.

The state of anxious expectation in which he had been kept throughout the day, had prevented Ahab from taking food; and now Elijah, with a considerateness due more to his office than to himself, bids him hasten back from Kishon (whither he had followed to witness the execution of the prophets) and refresh himself with all speed, for that the longed for rain is coming, and there will barely be time for him to get back to Jezreel before a storm bursts upon the country.

The king obeys; the people disperse at the warning; and the prophet, unmindful of his own bodily wants, ascends the mountain, accompanied by his single attendant, and, casting himself upon the earth, as we may infer from the text, in prayer, bids his attendant go up to the highest point, whence his eye could stretch through the lingering twilight over the broad expanse of the Mediterranean, and bring him word what he saw from thence.

Six times this is done without anything to report, Elijah continuing all the while in the same posture of humble supplication; but at the seventh repetition, the servant returns with the announcement that a small cloud, like a man's hand, is rising out of the far horizon. Elijah recognizes the sign that his prayer is answered, and sends his servant to warn the king that his departure must be delayed no longer. Swiftly spreads the

little cloud into a canopy that blackens the whole western sky. The wind comes rushing from the sea, first in gusts, then continuously, and brings up the scud thicker and thicker, and Ahab is scarcely in his chariot, and on his way to Jezreel, when the rain, the first that the parched and fissured earth had tasted for days and months, indeed for years, comes down in torrents.

Although no food has yet passed his lips, and the exertions and excitement of the day had been such as to have tasked his strength to the very utmost, Elijah's work is not finished. Through storm and darkness he runs in front of Ahab's chariot, for sixteen miles, over the plain of Esdraelon (the dust of which had probably been converted by the rain into a thick mud)\* until he sees the king safe within the gate of Jezreel. Great

\* See Stanley. Note iii., p. 348.

as we may believe his physical powers to have been, it needed, as we are assured, supernatural aid to enable him to accomplish this marvellous feat of strength and activity. "The hand of the Lord was upon him," and this it was that upheld him and carried him through.

And if we look for an object in the Divine aid being thus afforded him, we shall find it in the impression which his conduct was calculated to make upon the mind of Ahab. Heretofore he had been known to the king only in the defiant and lofty severity of his prophetic character. Now, in the hour of his triumph, he descends, as it were, from his high ground of the Lord's representative, and shows Ahab that, personally, he is a true subject and servant, that the motives by which he is actuated are not those of ill-will or disrespect towards himself, but simply of obedience to God, anxious concern for

his country's good, and earnest desire to bring Ahab, for his own sake, to a right understanding of his highest duties and his truest interests.\*

“Elias was a man of like passions with us;” for himself, therefore, it must have been, as we can well understand, most wholesome thus to be reminded by God of the truth of his position. If ever man was engaged in transactions the effect of which was to elevate him in his own estimation, and to make him think himself superior to all worldly and social distinctions, that man was Elijah on the memorable day we have now been reviewing. When we read, therefore, that “the hand of the Lord was upon him,” to require and enable him to finish the work of that day by an act of humble service and homage to the king whom, between sunrise and sunset, single-handed as he was, he had rebuked, de-

\* See Keil and “Paragraph Bible.”

fied, defeated, and, we may say, punished, we can conceive the Divine communication coming to him in terms identical with those in which it came in after times to men who, we are assured, were greater still than he. "My kingdom is not of this world." "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Yes! dear brethren, in the prophet, toiling on foot through wind and rain, and the darkness of a stormy night, that he may lead the way for Ahab riding in his chariot, we may see a type of Him who spared Himself no humiliation, no

toil, no privation, no suffering, that so He might bring back safely "to the city where they dwelt," those who would trust themselves to His guidance through the difficulties and dangers of a benighted world. Christ indeed fairly warns us, "if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me;" and to represent to the ungodly and the worldly that their return to their Father's house will be smooth and easy, would be to contradict all Scripture, and to ignore all experience. But great as we cannot but admit that the trials of the truly penitent must be expected to be—dark his road, desperate his struggles, and even deathlike his exhaustion and his faintness—as compared with Him who goes before him as his guide, he is as Ahab in his chariot, refreshed with meat and drink, to the prophet running on foot, sustained only by that meat "which the

world knows not of." Well, indeed, may Jesus say to His disciples, "take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart," and "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Easy! O how easy to us, comparatively to what it was to Him! Light to us, because heavy—O, how heavy—to Him! "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;" so that griefs and sorrows though we still have in our conflict with self, with the world, and with Satan, they "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," if we endure them following where Christ leads us. Light they are, and but for a moment while they work in us, through the Spirit of Christ that animates us in the struggle, "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

## LECTURE IV.

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### HOREB.

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I. KINGS, XIX., 9.

What doest thou here, Elijah?

It seems to have been only up to the gate of Jezreel that Elijah led the way on foot for Ahab and his retinue. The city itself he does not appear to have entered. To whatever place it was that he retired, full, no doubt, of the deepest anxiety as to the effect of the events which occupied our attention in the last lecture, he was not long before he received a communication which showed him that the temporal power of the enemies of Jehovah was not at an end, great

as was the shock which had undoubtedly been given to it.

Jezebel, enraged by the tidings which her husband brought her of what had taken place upon Mount Carmel, sends a message to Elijah which, while it boldly asserts her refusal to own defeat, betrays a consciousness that she is not really so strong as she would have it supposed that she believes herself. If she had really meant to defy Jehovah by putting His prophet to death in revenge for the slaughter of the prophets of Baal, she would hardly have sent to Elijah the explicit warning, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time." It seems likely that, in her inmost heart, she desired by this threat to get rid of Elijah, without running the risk of laying violent hands upon him. She may have hoped that it would so alarm him as to induce him to

fly out of her reach; and if it were so, she was not disappointed.

There is a very marked contrast between Elijah's present conduct and that which we contemplated last Friday, as one of the most striking instances upon record of holy, energetic, unflinching confidence. All is now changed. It is as though the effort of the contest upon Carmel, and the excitement of its result, had been too much for him, and he had sunk back exhausted into a state of weakness, which made him give way under the first trial he met with, to dejection and despondency. I do not refer merely to his flight to Beersheba. In the absence of any command of God's to him to remain where he was, or of any good end which, in his own judgment, enlightened by prayer, he could see would be answered by his remaining, it was his simple duty to provide for his safety; it would have been a tempting of the Lord

his God to brave the fury of Jezebel. He did well, therefore, to take refuge at the extremity of the kingdom of Judah, where he was beyond the jurisdiction of the court of Israel. But when he has reached Beersheba he has no longer any strength of spirit remaining in him. He leaves his servant in the city, as if ashamed that there should be any one to witness his weakness, and going a day's journey into the neighbouring wilderness, throws himself down under the scanty shade of one of the broom plants\* in which that district abounds, and, in a tone of the deepest depression, cries to God, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

All along it has been my plan to interpret God's dealings with the soul of His servant, rather than to trace the effect of Elijah's character and work

\* Not "juniper," as in the English version.

upon others with whom he came into contact. In the ravine of the Cherith I showed how he was inspired with confidence, at a time when he greatly needed it, by the mode in which his wants were supplied; and how he was warned that his confidence must be in God, not in mere earthly resources, by the failing of the brook which had supplied him only in what we should call, the natural order of things. At Zarephath I pointed out how a twofold lesson was again given him; first, that of implicit trust in the power of God, by the miraculous replenishment of the meal-barrel and the oil-cruse, and still more by the restoration of the dead child to life; and then that of tenderness and sympathy—natural tenderness and sympathy, by his being brought into contact with one of the acutest forms of human sorrow; and spiritual, by his seeing in the widow an example how the heart which chastisement repels from

God's messenger, and, in him, from God, is caused to turn again to him and to his heavenly Master, when mercy takes the place of chastisement. At the conclusion of last Friday's lecture, I treated the singular incident of his running before Ahab's chariot to Jezreel as calling him down, so to say, from the elevation of personal importance to which his triumph upon Carmel was calculated to uplift him, and admonishing him, as the Lord Jesus afterwards admonished his disciples, that God's true kingdom is "not of this world," and that the way to real greatness is not by domination but by service.

To-day it needs no extraordinary penetration to perceive that Elijah, in the wilderness of Beersheba, was again submitted by God to discipline, and to discern wherein that discipline consisted. Whereas in the instances I have just recapitulated, the admonition came to him,

as it were, from without, his teaching was the teaching of the events and circumstances of his outer life; in the present it springs rather from within. It consists in God's withdrawing from him, for a while, that spiritual support which he had hitherto so abundantly enjoyed, and throwing him, in a manner, upon his own resources, that so he might be made sensible how insufficient those resources were, and how entirely it was due to divine grace that he had been what he had been as the champion of Jehovah.

The case cannot but remind us of that of the apostle Paul, with this difference; that whereas in St. Paul's the discipline was positive, "a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him," in Elijah's it was negative, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of comfort and of ghostly strength, taken from him. The object in both cases was, lest they "should be exalted above measure." In both, the conclusion to which they were

to be brought was that of the all-sufficiency of God's grace, and therefore of the wisdom and the duty of recognising, in all circumstances, their entire dependence upon it. They were taught, both of them, that if in their success they gloried, they should "glory in the Lord," to whom they owed that success; if in failure they were dejected, they should take comfort from remembering Who was with them, and that His strength is often perfected in man's greatest weakness.

There is something very touching in the childlike condition to which he, who but now was the very type of robust, energetic, and enduring spiritual manhood, is reduced; and especially in the childlike treatment which he experiences at the hand of his Heavenly Father. The angel, gently waking him from the sleep into which, bowed down by the burthen of his sorrow,\* he had sunk beneath the

\* ὑπὸ τῆς βαρυθυμίας κατακαμφθέις.—CHRYSOSTOM.

broom-plant, and bidding him recruit his strength with the cake and the water, provided for him, apparently, by miracle; his sinking again to sleep when he has done so, and being again awaked by the same heavenly messenger, and again bidden to eat and drink, as having a journey before him, for which he would not have strength except he availed himself of the meal which was now supplied him—these things show a gentle, considerate care, on the part of God towards His servant in his hour of weakness, which reminds us of our Lord's assurance, that He who feeds the fowls of the air is not likely to overlook His intelligent creatures, and especially when they put their trust in Him to obey Him.

Whether, when the Scripture says, that “in the strength of this food,” this simple fare of bread and water, “Elijah went forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God,” it is meant

that that single meal was caused to sustain him during that whole period, or that similar provision was made for him, from time to time, as, in the course of nature, he required it, we cannot say, and it matters little. In either case it was by miracle that he was sustained; in the one, the miracle being similar to that by which Moses was sustained in Mount Sinai, when he went up to receive the tables of the Law; in the other, it being of the same kind, though not of the same duration, with that by which the children of Israel were fed during their forty years' wandering in the wilderness. In either case, too, it was with the object which the Lord God declares He had in subjecting His people to the like discipline, viz., "to humble and to prove," and to impress the lesson of dependence upon Him, and of the paramount importance of obedience to His word.

Arrived at Horeb, "the scene of many ancient associations calculated to revive his faith and courage,"\* he takes refuge for the night in a cave, which is sometimes supposed to have been the same "cleft in the rock" into which God had made Moses retire while He caused His glory to pass by. The original calls it "*the cave*," not necessarily implying that it was "some traditional sanctuary of that hallowed region,"† but more probably because, when the sacred record was written, the place was famous on account of its connection with the great prophet's history.

As he lies here, still under the influence of the same dejection as had driven him from Beer-Sheba, the word of the Lord comes to him with the question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"—an inquiry that could not, of course, be meant reproachfully, seeing the hand of the Lord

\* "Par. Bib."

† "Dict. of Bible."

itself had led him thither. The intention of the question rather was to arouse him to reflection and self-examination, and to lead him to open his heart to God, that so he might be brought into a condition to profit by the lesson he was about to receive. His reply betrays a state of mind which required to be remedied and enlightened by Divine teaching.

“I have been very jealous for the Lord of Hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only am left; and they seek my life to take it away.”

Here is an implied complaint against God for not having supported His own cause, as the prophet presumes to think He should have done; and also an implied demand upon Him to interfere again, as He had interfered before, by some judicial visitation.

Elijah had done, brethren, what we ourselves are too apt to do in regard to the work of God; he had formed his own arbitrary notions as to the nature and extent of the progress it ought to have made in his hands, and being disappointed in his unwarrantable expectations, he had overlooked or underrated the grounds he really had for hope and confidence. Was he, indeed, as he said, the only true servant of Jehovah? What, then, was Obadiah? And why should there not be others like Obadiah? Did it show such an entire hostility to the God of their fathers, on the part of the Israelites, that they had fallen on their faces and given Him glory, when He sent fire to consume the sacrifice on Carmel, and afterwards had obeyed his own bidding by seizing and slaying the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal? And was it no sign that Jezebel was really restrained by fears she was too proud to own, that, instead of

being sent actually to seize and slay him, her messengers had come to afford him the opportunity of escaping? Surely he had, as we often, if not always, have in analogous cases, quite enough to warrant his fullest trust in God, even though, as yet, or to all appearance, he had done but little towards accomplishing the ends he had proposed to himself by his mission. Had he reason to believe that the Lord was really with him? If he had, then had he no sufficient ground for his present gloomy expostulation. And as for the implied invocation of some further acts of severity on God's part towards His offending people, we shall see, in a few minutes, how that is dealt with.

His complaint is met by a command to go forth from the cave and take his stand "on the mount, before the Lord." "Then, as before with Moses in the same locality, 'the Lord passed by;' passed in all the terrors of His most appalling

manifestations. A fierce wind tore the solid mountains, and shivered the granite cliffs of Sinai; an earthquake crash reverberated through the defiles of those naked valleys; and fire burnt in the incessant blaze of eastern lightning.”\* But in none of these, as we are given to understand, was the Lord present. And then, when these phenomena of terror were passed, and the wild solitude was once more wrapt in profoundest silence, there reached his ear a still small voice—a soft whisper, a murmur as of a gentle breathing—and in that, it is implied, the Lord was present.

Brethren, if we would interpret that voice, as Elijah doubtless did, if not at the moment, on after reflection, we may do so by setting the manifestation side by side with that which was made to Moses

\* “Bible Dictionary.” It would be scarcely possible to find language more effective than this to paraphrase the sacred narrative.

in the same region. Of this latter we read how "the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with Moses there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord;" and how "the Lord passed by before Moses and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." And it is this portion of the proclamation to which the still small voice that breathed into Elijah's ear may be considered to answer; it is by this that we must interpret that voice; as the subsequent and severer portion of the same proclamation finds its corresponding assurance in what the Lord afterwards says to Elijah concerning the fate that awaits those who should persist in their rebellion against Him.

In sum, the great purpose of the manifestation in Elijah's case was to

show him that his hot and impetuous zeal was inconsistent with the love and grace of God; that such interventions as he desired of power and judgment, however necessary in their right seasons and due proportions, were not the agencies to be relied upon, or chiefly employed, or indeed to be employed at all by man in the exercise of his own discretion, for the support or extension of the kingdom of Jehovah. It is, in short, the repetition in another and more distinct and emphatic form of the lesson which I supposed to be taught him at Zarephath—a lesson which, looking at it from our own point of view, we may describe as teaching the superiority of the merciful spirit of the Gospel over the terrors of the Law for truly representing God, or best accomplishing His highest purposes in reconciling sinners to Himself.

It would seem that Elijah had re-

treated into the cave again at some point in this wonderful scene. Bold as he was, he was probably driven in by fear, when the successive convulsions of nature which have been described, took place on that lonely height. On hearing the “still small voice,” however, he reverently wraps his face in his mantle, as a “sinful man, who cannot bear the sight of the holy God,” and goes out and stands at the cave’s mouth.

Here the question, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” is repeated: and with the same purpose as before, of directing his thoughts inwards to the scrutiny of his thoughts and feelings. His repetition of the answer he had given when the question was first addressed to him, need not be understood as though no effect had been produced upon his mind by what had just occurred; but it does show that there still lingered in him something of dissatisfaction, or, at least,

of perplexity, as if he could not, though he fain would, understand why such impunity, not to say such success, should be permitted to God's enemies, and why he, God's faithful servant, should be reduced to the extremity of flying for his life from them.

The answer first of all encourages him, by giving him a commission which proves that he is not really brought so low as he conceives himself to be. Fugitive and helpless as he seems, he is to become the anointer of kings; not indeed directly, in his own person, but officially, through one whom he is authorized to consecrate as his successor, "Elisha, the son of Shaphat." By him Hazael should be anointed king of Syria, in the room of Benhadad, and Jehu king of Israel, instead of Ahab. And by these, together with Elisha himself, all was to be done, in the way of judgment upon those Israelites who should place

themselves out of the pale of mercy, that was required to realize the latter part of the name proclaimed to Moses—“that will by no means clear the guilty.”

And “in order that he may learn, to his shame, that to his eye, clouded by dejection, the cause of the Lord in Israel appeared much more desperate”\* than it would have done had he looked at it with that eye purged by faith, and enlightened by charity, he is assured by God that “He has left Him seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”

Restored to much of his former energy by the means which the Lord thus graciously employs with him, Elijah withdraws, as he is bidden, to the wilderness of Damascus, “where, secure from the rage of Jezebel, and yet not

\* Keil.

far from his mission in Israel,"\* he might watch his opportunity of executing the duty committed to him. He makes his way, how soon we do not know, but apparently very soon after the scene just concluded, to Abel-meholah, in the valley of Jordan: and there he sees, on the other side of the river, the man whom the Lord had designated to him as his successor, superintending the ploughing of his land with no less than twelve ploughs that were being driven before him, he following with the last of them. This shows that he, or, at any rate, his father, was a person of substance, and gives great force to his following and ministering to the prophet, as an example of forsaking father and mother, and sacrificing worldly advantages, at the call of God and for His service.

Crossing the river,† Elijah advances to him, and, by an action said to be

\* Keil.

† See "Dictionary of Bible."

still used in the East as a form of designating a successor, casts upon him the sheep-skin mantle which he always wore, and then hastens past him. Elisha, doubtless divinely enlightened, at once understood the purpose of this action, and as Elijah was moving away, ran after him, and begged permission only to bid farewell to his parents, promising that, that done, he would follow him. The request is granted, but not without an intimation, intended to overcome any reluctance that might lurk beneath it, to the effect that it was a great office to which he was called, a high honour that was destined for him. "And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people" (as a farewell entertainment), "and they did eat. Then he arose and went after Elijah and ministered unto him."

Closing here the portion of our subject for this day's contemplation, let us, for a few moments, consistently with the plan pursued in the previous lectures, consider this association of Elisha with him in his prophetic office, as it was likely to influence Elijah's estimate of himself.

Called upon by God to wield extraordinary powers, and to bear witness for Him in a most conspicuous manner, he would not have been, as Holy Scripture tells us he was, "a man of like passions with us," if such distinction had exposed him to no danger of being "exalted above measure." From the first we have seen God dealing with him in such wise as to correct, by various means, this natural effect of his peculiar vocation; and the companionship of Elisha would seem designed to operate in the same direction; and yet so to operate as, while it kept him humble, at the same time to cheer

and sustain him in his mission. It was a perpetual memento to him that, if for a long period he had been able to work for God quite single-handed, to endure the long and absolute solitude of the glen of Cherith without anything like failure of heart, and to stand forth alone in the contest with power and with numbers on Carmel; this was due, not to the strength inherent in himself (strong-souled as he was, beyond the ordinary measure), but to that with which he was specially endowed from on high to meet a great emergency.

In the wilderness of Beer-sheba, as we have seen, this special endowment was, if not wholly, to a great extent, withdrawn; and so he learnt his own essential infirmity. He learnt that, in the absence of extraordinary help from his God, he was, like other men, dependent upon human companionship and human sympathy for the health and vigour of his

mind and spirit. Contrasting the comfort and refreshment which he found in the society of Elisha, with the weakness and gloom of which he had been so painfully sensible for some time previous, he was no longer tempted to regard himself as a being almost superhuman in his ability to dispense with that intercourse with his fellows, the want of which is, to men in general, intolerable misery. God now dealt with him as afterwards God manifest in the flesh dealt with, what we may call, His "school of prophets." When Jesus, having first similarly organized His apostles themselves, "chose other seventy also," for the wider promulgation of His truth, He sent them forth, not singly, but two and two; thereby at once reminding them, as Elijah is now reminded, that their mission from above did not exempt them from the infirmities of humanity; that their communion with God could sanctify, indeed,

but would not supply the place to them of communion with man; and that the presence with them of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, would not be a substitute for that solace, so needful ever to the human spirit—the solace of heart answering to heart, “as face answereth to face in water.”

And thus himself made alive to his need of human intercourse and human sympathy, and enabled, by possessing them, to comprehend their preciousness and their power, he would henceforth fulfil his prophetic office with due consideration of the nature of the human heart in this respect, and would understand the meaning of the Lord’s presence in the still, small voice, breathed softly into his ear, as in confidence and tenderness.

And if it thus humbled him to feel his need of companionship, and to understand how much he depended upon it for

his daily comfort and usefulness, it, at the same time, cheered him to reflect how good his God had been to him thus to supply his need. No longer could he say or think that he alone was left a prophet in Israel. In Elisha he had not only an associate, but a successor—one whom God instructed him so to identify with himself, that what Elisha would do he might regard as his own doing.

And so he was taught the further lesson of considering his work for God as not limited to the accomplishment of ends which he himself might witness with his own bodily eye. He was taught to regard it as reaching into a futurity that lay beyond the limits of his present life—a lesson, dear brethren, which (now that life and immortality have been brought to light by the Gospel) we may interpret and apply in general terms, as reminding us—

That “we look not at the things which

are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for that the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen"—the fruits of the soft breathing of God's Holy Spirit on the inward ear of the heart and the conscience—"are eternal."

## LECTURE V.

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### THE FIRE FROM HEAVEN.

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ST. LUKE, ix., 54-6.

And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them .....

THE manner in which Ahab, King of Israel, had obtained possession of the vineyard of Naboth, is too well known to need that I should recall the details of the story to your recollection. The act itself was his wife's, but God does not, on that account, hold him the less responsible for it, seeing that he both acquiesced

in its commission, and eagerly availed himself of its fruits.

Hitherto the mission of Elijah has been chiefly directed to the reformation of religion. The laws which are commonly distinguished as those of “the first table” are they which he has been called upon more especially to vindicate. The acknowledgment of other gods besides Jehovah—Baal and Ashtoreth—and the worship of those gods under a variety of outward symbols and representations—Baalim and Ashtaroth—are the sins which he has been employed to denounce and to punish. And, notwithstanding the disappointment to which we heard him, in the last lecture, give vent, there is evidence in the chapter of the First Book of Kings\* which immediately precedes that containing the story of Naboth, that the prophets of the Lord have gained confidence from the victory on Carmel, and that Ahab, however unwillingly,

\* I. Kings, xxii., 13, 22, 28, 35—43.

recognises their office, and gives them access to his presence.

So far, then, we may say that the cause of religion has prospered in the hands of Elijah. It now remains for him to assert the oneness of that cause with the cause of morality. He must give Ahab, and through him his queen, his court, and his people, to understand, that what is required of them is, not a superstitious, but an intelligent and moral acknowledgment of Jehovah as God; that He must be owned and obeyed as resolved and able, not only to defend Himself against being dishonoured by man, but also to protect man against the wrong or violence of his fellow man. In short, it must be made plain that He who said, "Thou shalt have none other gods but me," and "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image," and "Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain," is the same Who also said,

“Thou shalt not covet,” and “Thou shalt not bear false witness,” and “Thou shalt not kill,” and “Thou shalt not steal.”

Attended by Jehu, who afterwards became king of Israel, and by Bidkar,\* afterwards “Jehu’s captain,” and possibly by the rest of his court, so as to make a ceremonial expressive of his gratification at the success of his wife’s infamous device, Ahab had gone down from Samaria to Jezreel, to take possession of the murdered Naboth’s vineyard; the land being forfeited to the king through its owner having undergone capital punishment. This formality over, when Ahab is on his way back to the capital, attended as he had come to Jezreel, the exhilarating current of his thoughts is arrested, humbling recollections are awakened in him, and his conscience is aroused into disagreeable activity by the unexpected and unwelcome appearance

\* See II. Kings, ix., 25.

of Elijah. The prophet had been distinctly instructed by "the word of the Lord" thus to seek the king, and to denounce the punishment destined by God for his twofold crime of killing and taking possession—"In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine."

The feelings excited in Ahab's breast by the stern rebuke and the terrible threat, find utterance in the question, half of anger, half of alarm, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

From this it would seem likely, that ever since the day of Baal's discomfiture on Mount Carmel, the monarch had been haunted by apprehensions of Elijah's calling him to account for one or other of his misdeeds or evil compliances. He regarded Elijah as a sort of impersonation of his troublesome inward monitor, a disturber of his repose, a marrer of his self-complacency, and a forerunner of

calamity. To be this was, in his view, to be only his enemy. He could not see, or he would not, how such an one might really be anything but his enemy, driving him to present self-restraint in order to save him from future suffering, or inflicting, at God's command, chastisement for his sin, that so his sin might be forsaken, and God be set free to lavish on him the riches of His loving kindness. Would Ahab but have understood it, he had, in truth, no better friend than the man who had shown him, by irrefragable proofs, how his conduct was regarded by the Lord God of Israel; and had supplied him with motives and inducements of the strongest kind for seeking the favour of that God by rendering to Him an undivided service.

Elijah's reply is couched in the same stern language of undaunted faithfulness as that which he had made to Ahab upon a former occasion;

“I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself\* to work evil in the sight of the Lord;”

And then, speaking as the Lord’s mouthpiece, he pronounced an imprecation upon Ahab, which has been thus forcibly paraphrased; “I will take away thy posterity; I will cut them off down to the last man; I will make thy house like that of Jeroboam and Baasha; thy blood shall be shed in the same spot where the blood of thy victim was shed so recently; thy wife and thy children shall be torn in this very garden by the wild dogs of the city, or, as common carrion, devoured by the birds of the air,” those vultures which, in eastern climes, are always wheeling aloft under the clear blue sky.†

This dreadful curse is not without its

\* Compare Romans, vi., 16—23.

† “Dictionary of the Bible.” In one clause I have made an alteration, being satisfied with Keil’s reasons (I. Kings, xiv., 10) for rejecting the interpretation.

salutary, though, alas! but transient effect. The impression it made upon Ahab was strong enough (but it did not last) to cause him to exhibit all the outward signs of lively contrition, as rending his clothes, wearing and sleeping in sackcloth, refusing food, and moving pensively about: and this affords the opportunity for another of those palliatives, which we have seen so repeatedly applied to Elijah through the fatherly vigilance of the God whom he served. As if to remind him again of the Name symbolised by “the still small voice”—the name of “merciful and forgiving”—the word of the Lord comes to him, saying,

“ Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before Me. I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son’s days will I bring the evil upon his house.”

The meaning of this is, not that Ahab shall escape his own part of the punishment denounced by Elijah, but only that

he shall be spared the pain of witnessing that part of it which was to fall upon his wife and his children. Relapsing into his former ungodliness, he is slain in the battle of Ramoth-Gilead, and the chariot in which he had received his death-wound being "washed in the pool of Samaria," the dogs licked up the blood-stained water, according to the word of Elijah. It may possibly have formed, as some suppose, a part of the mitigation of the divine sentence that this ignominy to the royal blood did not take place, as originally threatened, on the very spot of Naboth's murder at Jezreel, but in Samaria. The discrepancy, however, admits of other explanations, for which I may refer you to your commentaries at home. Let it suffice now, to remind you how Jehoram, Ahab's son, was slain by Jehu, and cast, by his command, into Naboth's land, expressly that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled;

and also how, in the case of Jezebel, the prediction was, fourteen years after, accomplished to the very letter; so that Jehu, who was then king, when he heard the treatment that her body had met with, exclaimed, "This is the word of Jehovah, which He spake by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall the dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the earth; so that they shall not say, 'this is Jezebel.' "

Ahab was succeeded by his son Ahabziah; and in him we at once trace the effects of maternal influence. Lying under a dangerous sickness, which was occasioned by a fall "through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria," he sends messengers (may be at his mother's instigation) to the Philistine city of Ekron, where was a

shrine and oracle of one of the many Baalim—Baal-zebub, “the Lord of flies,” “so called,” it has been conjectured, “because he was worshipped, either under the form of a fly, like the beetle-god of the Egyptians, or as the supposed protector against those insects,”\* of whose power to inflict annoyance in eastern climates we may judge from the fact, that a visitation of them constituted one of the ten plagues invoked by Moses upon Egypt. The object of the king in sending this embassy was to inquire of the deity whether he should recover of his disease.

“But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou

\* “Par. Bib.”

shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed."

The messengers of Ahaziah were ignorant who it was that they had thus encountered; but his singular appearance and authoritative language and bearing so impressed them, that they went no further on their way to Ekron, but returned and reported to the king what had happened. In their description of the "hairy man," or the man wearing a hairy garment, "girt with a girdle of leather about his loins," Ahaziah at once recognises the object of his father's dread and his mother's hatred, and orders out a company of fifty soldiers to arrest him. They find him seated upon an eminence, some suppose one of the heights of Carmel, which is difficult of access from the road by which they had come. Their commander, therefore, summons him from below to surrender.

“Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down.”

“If I be a man of God,” is the reply, “then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty.”

“And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.”

Another company, recklessly despatched by the king on the same errand, meets the same fate. But still, with a determination which belonged to the character he may have inherited from his mother, if she herself were not the direct instigator of all that he did in this matter, he sends forth a third band with the same orders. Warned by the fate of those who had gone before, and probably terror-stricken by the sight of their remains that strewed with ashes the foot of the hill on which Elijah was seated, the commander of this third company climbs the height, and, falling on his knees before the prophet, implores that

he and his men may be spared the infliction of his terrible vengeance. At the bidding of an angel, Elijah not only abstains from doing harm to the suppliant or his party, but diverts from them the wrath of the king or of Jezebel, by going down with them to Samaria, and presenting himself before Ahaziah.

There, in the sick chamber, and before the sick bed, he fearlessly repeats, with his own mouth, the prophecy of death which the first messengers had brought back from their interrupted expedition to Ekron; and so, being suffered, as we may presume to depart freely, he closes at once his ministry to the house of Ahab, and his conflicts with the power of Baal-worship. As to Ahaziah, the sacred record says, "So he died, according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken."

I have more than once referred, in

these lectures, to the contrast which the Scriptures themselves lead us to notice between the spirit of the Law and the spirit of the Gospel, and also called your attention to the various means employed by God to moderate that fiery zeal of Elijah's, which, in a temperament like his, it was so much the tendency of the work he had to do unduly to foster and to stimulate. In the words which I have taken for my text this morning, we see our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ restraining and rebuking a similar spirit which had manifested itself in two of His own disciples. In their jealousy for their Master's honour, they would have punished the inhospitable Samaritan village with a punishment of the same kind with that which Elijah had inflicted upon the two Samaritan captains and their companies. "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to

save them," is Jesus's reply to their hasty and ill-considered proposal; and when we read it in connection with our present subject, it naturally suggests the question, whether or not it contains, as some have supposed it to do, an implied condemnation of Elijah himself, as well as a direct one of those who would fain have imitated his terrible severity.

Now this question is at once answered by observing that, if the spirit of Elijah was, as we have all along assumed it to be, the spirit of the Law, it must have been, as such, a "holy, just, and good" spirit, though it was not the same spirit, or, rather, though it did not work and express itself in the same way, as the spirit of the Gospel. "Wrath," it has been well remarked, "is as truly in God as love is; although in the grace of reconciliation, love prevails over wrath, and, during the existing period of the Gospel, stays its progress. The spirit of

the fear of God is the very beginning of the spirit of adoption. The severe zeal of the Law is, according to the relation of man to God, and the stage of divine revelation, quite as pure and holy as is pitying and interceding love. Elias was on the mount with Christ, and John the Baptist, in the very spirit of Elias (as was foretold of him), threatened men with unquenchable fire, ere Christ brought down from heaven upon the sinful people, in room of this fire, the fire of the Holy Ghost.\* Nay, it is of that Son of Man Himself, that the Scripture tells us that a time is coming when He shall be "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel."

It is one thing, however, for a certain spirit or temper to be holy and right and good in itself, and another for it to be so

\* Stier's "Reden Jesu."

in particular persons, at particular seasons, in particular measures, and under particular circumstances. Moreover, though there is undoubtedly such a thing as spurious, mistaken, misdirected, or ill-timed tenderness, it is a fault neither so dangerous to the soul, nor, perhaps, so easily or frequently fallen into, as that of carnal zeal—I mean, the zeal of mere temper—which justifies itself by such specious names as jealousy for God's honour, devotion to truth, hatred of evil, righteous indignation, holy firmness, and the like.

It is observable, with regard to Elijah's great acts of severity, that two of the three—the drought which he imprecated upon the land of Israel, and that which we have been considering this morning—were of a kind which it rested entirely with God to permit or not. In point of fact, they were God's acts, not Elijah's. And so those incidents connected with

St. Peter and St. Paul which have been sometimes appealed to in justification of religious persecution—the striking of Ananias and Sapphira dead, and the smiting of Elymas with blindness—were both instances of God Himself punishing by human agents, and not of heaven-commissioned men taking it upon them to wield powers of destruction about which they could not know whether God sanctioned their employment or not. St. Peter did but rebuke Ananias; and then, having seen how God visited his lie, he foretold to Sapphira that she would share her husband's fate. St. Paul, again, announced to Elymas that the hand of the Lord was upon him; but neither did he, any more than St. Peter, actually inflict the punishment of sudden blindness. The judgments themselves were purely divine; and the power really conferred upon the human agents was, at the utmost, that of prescience or predi-

tion, not that of execution. Such, also, was the case with Elijah, in the two instances to which I have referred; but not so in the third—the slaying of the prophets of Baal. That was an act purely human—effected by man's aid alone, and with weapons entirely of man's forging.

For this reason it has been supposed (and there is certainly nothing to contradict, if there be nothing positively to support the opinion) that Elijah's flight to Beersheba, his deep dejection of soul, his lonely wandering to Horeb, and the scene he was called forth from the cave to witness there, were designed by God to chastise him for exceeding his commission in that matter. I do not concur in that view. Though the means employed were certainly altogether human, I believe that the guidance was none the less divine; and sure I am that if God may (as we know He may) take away

man's life, or inflict calamity upon him, by means of the inanimate instruments of His will—the drought, the pestilence, the flood, the lightning, or the earthquake—without raising a question in any pious mind about His justice, His wisdom, or His goodness; no less may He do so by the exclusive employment of human agents. Ardent, and to some extent, perhaps, excessive, as was Elijah's zeal for the Lord of Hosts, I do not believe he would have been hurried only by the excitement of that zeal into such a terrible act of severity as the unauthorized slaughter of four hundred and fifty men, however guilty: I do not believe that he would have done it, without the distinct word of the Lord for it. As we saw when we were dealing with that portion of the subject, the lives so taken were, in fact, distinctly forfeited to the Divine Law. Ahab ought to have executed that law. In his default, Elijah, as I believe, received his instructions directly

from heaven to vindicate that law, by a conspicuous and impressive exaction of its penalties.

What then, brethren, is the practical conclusion to which these considerations bring us? Surely it is that nothing but such warrant as, among sound-judging and good men, there cannot be two opinions about, will justify the use of anything like external compulsion in the propagation or maintenance of truth. "It is the part of religion," says Tertullian, "not to compel religion;" and another Christian writer,\* "The faith must be defended not by killing but by dying." And the principle contained in these *dicta* applies to all forms and degrees of outward constraint; to the spirit which should animate Christian legislature, Christian discipline, and Christian training; to the Church, the

\* Lactantius; both quoted by Wordsworth, Greek Test., St. Luke, ix., 55.

State, the family, and the school. I do not say, however, that it applies equally to all; for it certainly makes all the difference of what kind the outward constraint may be; whether it be that of the sword of persecution, or such as our Church refers to in her Commination—a “godly discipline,” the object of which is, in no sense, the destruction of the sinner, but the saving of his soul “in the day of the Lord.”

Let us be careful, too, in our application of the principle in question, to note the distinction between inflicting punishment oneself, and simply warning of the consequences of sin—declaring the punishment to be hereafter inflicted by God. It would be most erroneous to draw from that contrast upon which we have dwelt so much between the spirit and tone of the Law and those of the Gospel, the conclusion that “the terrors of the Lord” have no place in Christian teaching;

that the worm which never dieth, and the fire which shall never be quenched, are out of harmony with the dispensation of mercy and love; and that the indiscriminate prophesying of smooth things, the addressing equally to all comforts, invitations, promises, is more truly the preaching of the Gospel of peace, than is the uplifting of the voice in vivid delineations of “the wrath to come.”

It was not a desire to rebuke sharply, or to threaten sternly, the inhospitable Samaritans, that our blessed Lord restrained by the words I have taken for my text to-day; but it was an eagerness to smite rather than rebuke, to punish rather than threaten, to destroy rather than warn against destruction, and, in short, to usurp the prerogative of God. I do not deny that the carnal zeal of the two disciples may often enter quite as much into denunciatory words as ever it can do into penal acts; but still, I repeat,

there is the broadest possible distinction to be made between the one and the other; and the principles which would forbid the latter, not only do not necessarily restrain the former, but may fully allow, and even imperatively require them.

The Christian teacher must always remember, and his hearers must always remember in forming their estimate of his teaching, that though it is the dispensation of the Gospel under which we live, yet the world has not yet fully realized the Gospel; nay, the Church has not yet fully realized it. In the Church of Christ the kingdom of God is, and yet is not, come to us. It is come according to the Divine ideal of that Church—in the purpose of God—in that view of His which embraces the future as though it were the present. But it is not come in so far as sin and Satan still maintain their contest with truth and holiness. Theirs is a losing cause, but not yet a lost one;

they are being cast out, but are not yet cast out; the Church is being saved,\* but, as a whole, is not yet saved. Still, therefore, are we under a dispensation which is, in some sense, preparatory. Still is there a sense, and a most true sense, in which the message of the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, is applicable to us, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Still must it be our daily prayer, “Thy kingdom come.” And if this be so, still must there be room, nay, still occasion, in the Church, for the Lord’s prophets to prophesy in the spirit of Elias, and to reiterate the testimony that “now is the axe laid to the root of the trees;” and that “every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, will be hewn down and cast into the fire.”

I have said (as others have said again

\* See *Acts*, ii., 47, where it is well known that the expression rendered, “such as should be saved,” means “such as were being saved,” or “were in the way, or placed in the state of salvation.”

and again—so often that it has become a commonplace and a truism) that moral suasion, as opposed to external compulsion, is the agency by which men are to be wrought upon to repent and believe the Gospel. But, brethren, what is moral suasion? Is it confined to attracting by promises, to winning by gentleness, to working upon the softer feelings of the heart, to the exhibition of the tenderer aspects of the Divine nature? Is it, I say, *confined* to this? Assuredly not. It is the same apostle who employs that earnest language of what we commonly understand by persuasion, “We pray you, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God”—it is the same St. Paul, and in the same Epistle, nay, in the same chapter of that Epistle, who writes in this strain of warning, “We must all appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to

that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord"—being ourselves fully alive to the "fearful thing" it is "to fall into the hands of the living God"—"we persuade men"—we bring to bear upon them the same awful considerations as have wrought with such convincing power upon ourselves.

Yes ! believe me, dear brethren, the "still small voice" may whisper *Beware !* no less than *Welcome !*—*Tremble !* no less than *Be of good cheer !* Nay, hereafter it will be the same lips—the lips of that Son of Man who "came, not to destroy men's lives but to save them," which shall say, first indeed (and oh ! may it be our's, every one of us, to receive that summons !) "Come ye blessed"; but afterwards, "Depart ye cursed"—"Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire!"

## LECTURE VI.

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### THE TRANSLATION AND SECOND COMING.

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ST. MATTHEW, xvii., 11.

..... Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

OUR review of Elijah's history would not be complete without some reference to the letter which is recorded in the twenty-first chapter of the second book of Chronicles, as having been addressed by him to Jehoram, King of Judah.

Jeroham was the eldest son of Jehosaphat, and had married a daughter of Ahab's. Having been designated by his father to succeed him on the throne, he no sooner gained possession of regal power, than he exerted it to put to

death his six younger brothers, partly, no doubt, in order to get rid of persons who might become dangerous to him through aspiring to the crown, and partly that he might possess himself of the great wealth which Jehoshaphat had bestowed upon those younger sons—"gifts of silver and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced-cities in Judah."

There is a chronological difficulty connected with Elijah's letter to this worthy son-in-law of Ahab and Jezebel, which has occasioned a good deal of ingenious discussion. It arises out of the fact that the death of Jehoshaphat, Jehoram's father, took place subsequently to Elijah's removal from the world. Three modes may be suggested for reconciling the seeming contradiction. One is, that, by the error of a copyist, the name of Elijah has been substituted for that of Elisha as the writer of the letter: another, that, as Elijah's successor, Elisha boldly used the

name and claimed the authority of his great master; if indeed Elijah, warned of God beforehand what Jehoram's course would be, had not provided Elisha with a document, or the substance of a document, which, when the time came, he might put forth with the sanction of his master's name: and a third explanation is, that Jehoshaphat had called his son to share the throne with him, some years previous to his own death, and that it was in the exercise of the power he had thus obtained—perhaps while his father was absent on some warlike expedition—that Jehoram had been guilty of the fratricidal acts and other iniquities which called forth the death-warning that came to him from the prophet of Israel.

“Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father” (so the letter runs), “because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa King of Judah, but hast

walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring like the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and hast also slain thy brethren of thy father's house which were better than thyself; behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods, and thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day." And then the sacred chronicler goes on to relate how the denunciation was fulfilled, in all its particulars, within a period of two years, Jehoram himself, at the close of that period, dying "of sore diseases."

And now we have reached the concluding chapter of our prophet's history. It appears that warning of his approaching end had been given him by Jehovah, and that he had been bidden to

repair from Gilgal, where he was—not the Gilgal of Joshua and Samuel, in the valley of the Jordan, but another, situated upon elevated ground—by the way of Bethel and Jericho, to the banks of the river which is pre-eminently *the* river of Sacred Story.

Whether from a desire to spare his friend the pain of witnessing his departure, the mode of which may not have been communicated to him; or that he might test the fidelity of the man upon whom his own office was to descend; or with something of the same love of solitude which had led him to dismiss his servant before he wandered into the wilderness of Beersheba; or because, “in his great humility, he wished all witnesses of his glorification to be absent,”\* Elijah prays Elisha to tarry where he is, and leave him to prosecute his journey alone. Before each stage of it—at Gilgal, at

\* Cornelius a Lapide, quoted by Keil.

Bethel, and at Jericho—he repeats the proposal, and each time with the same result: “As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee,” is each time the decided answer of the faithful disciple and stedfast friend.

Either his own sagacious observation, or a communication from Jehovah, had apprised Elisha with what purpose this journey was undertaken, so that when, first at Bethel and again at Jericho, “the sons of the prophets,” to whom the Divine purpose had been made known, address him with the question, “Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?” he replies, “Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.”

If there lingered in the soul of Elijah any of that disappointed and dissatisfied spirit which had vented itself on Horeb in the complaint, “they have slain thy prophets with the sword, and I, even I

only, am left," it must have been completely dispelled by what he witnessed in these places to which he was expressly directed by guidance from above. The Lord, as he said to Elisha, had sent him both to Bethel and to Jericho. And what did he find in those cities? Not a few servants of the Lord, concealing their profession from their nearest neighbours and their closest kindred, and discovered only by those tokens which the spiritual instinct (if I may so call it) enables those that are spiritual mutually to interpret; but Schools of the Prophets, openly instructing the people both to understand and acknowledge Jehovah, and to renounce Baal, and no less openly strengthening one another by the organisation and the personal intercourse which their name implies. This was undoubtedly one of the fruits of Elijah's mission, if the foundation of these societies were not, as we may fairly suppose it was, his own

direct work :\* and it may have been with the express design of rewarding him before his departure with this evidence of his success, that the stages of his last earthly journey were appointed by God at places where some of the most numerous and flourishing of these fraternities had their seats.

But it was certainly not less for their sakes than for Elijah's that "the sons of the prophets" received this visit from their earthly master, when he was on his way to his final exaltation. They had been Divinely informed beforehand that this visit was to be his last; and this knowledge would give incalculable weight to every word of instruction, of exhortation, and of encouragement that he addressed to them. Knowing, too, that the road he was taking was to terminate in his removal from the world, they would watch his course with the deepest interest, and inform themselves about its

\* See Keil on II. Kings, iv.—viii.

every incident. And thus, when the account of his rapture into Heaven reached them, they would receive it with minds prepared to recognize all its significance, and to realize all its influence. It would be to them (but of course in a far lower degree) what the Resurrection, and also the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ were to His chosen disciples—a pledge of the Divine blessing upon their work now, and of its ultimate triumph, and so a stimulus to action, or a support under suffering, as circumstances rendered either most needful for them.

From Jericho, Elijah's last halting-place, no less than fifty of these sons of the prophets were drawn forth after him, anxious to witness what would happen to him when he reached the shores of Jordan. A feeling of respect had caused them to follow at a distance; but not so far off, it may be presumed, but that

they could see what took place upon the water's edge. Rolling up his sheep-skin mantle, so as to form, as from its stiffness it would do, a kind of staff, Elijah smote the river; whereupon, as when Moses stretched forth his rod over the Red Sea, its "waters were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground."

In their passage,\* Elijah says to his companion, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee."

"I pray thee," (is the reply) "let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."

The key to the meaning of this answer is probably to be found in that enactment of the Mosaic law which requires a man to acknowledge the claims of primogeniture, by giving to his firstborn "a double portion of all that he hath."† "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me," will, in this view, mean, "Let

\* Ἐπειδὴ διαβῆναι, LXX.

† Deut., xxi, 17.

me be acknowledged and endowed as the firstborn son in the prophetic family. If I am to take thy place among the prophets when thou art removed from us, let me be qualified for that pre-eminence by being gifted beyond the rest, with the spirit which we shall all of us be conscious that we inherit from thee—from thee who art our spiritual father—who hast begotten us an holy family of witnesses for the true God, in an adulterous and sinful generation.”\*

This, as I cannot but think, is a far better explanation of Elijah’s request than any of those more commonly received, which understand it as expressing a desire to possess the prophetic spirit in a larger measure than Elijah himself had possessed it in. “He that is departing,” (it has been well said) “cannot bequeath to his heir more than he himself has;”

\* Keil. The explanation receives confirmation from the words of Elisha, II. Kings, ii., 12, “My father, my father.”

but, in dividing his goods amongst his children, to each one severally as he will, he may provide for the greater demands that will be made upon one above the others, by bequeathing to that one a larger proportion than he does to those others.

And it indicates a humble, and not a greedy or grasping spirit in Elisha, that he should have expressed his sense of his insufficiency to maintain the dignity which was about to devolve upon him, unless he should receive supernatural aid for it, beyond that which might be vouchsafed to any of his fellows in the prophetic office. “In myself” (he may be considered to say) “I am but the equal, nay, the inferior, of others who hold this ministry. If I am to be looked up to by them hereafter, as thou art, thou must add to me more than thou addest to them. I must be as thy first-born, and receive a double portion, as

compared with what they receive, of thy masterful spirit."

"Thou hast asked a hard thing," Elijah answers him, "a thing," that is, "which it does not rest with me to give or withhold, but for which you must look only to God. To God, therefore, I refer the answer to thy petition. 'If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.'"

And now we may suppose that the opposite bank of the Jordan was reached, and Elijah's feet trod once more the soil of his early home—Gilead. The conversation we have just heard is hardly finished, when, suddenly, there rushes between the two, and drives them apart from each other, what is mysteriously described in the sacred text as "a chariot of fire and horses of fire;" and then Elijah, in the midst of a tempest, was carried up (as the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus

explains it) by this chariot, into the skies.\*

The sequel of this scene, which, though intimately connected with the history of Elijah, belongs more strictly to that of Elisha, it may suffice for me simply to rehearse in the words of the Sacred record.

“ And Elisha saw it, and he cried, ‘ My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.’ And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view

\* Ecclesiasticus, xlviij., 9. . The writer of the article **ELIJAH**, in the “Biblical Dictionary,” seems to have overlooked this passage.

at Jericho saw him, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.' And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."

Now, in taking a review of the history which we have had under our consideration during the last five weeks, it may appear to us that the incidents of that history, extraordinary and striking as many of them are, and the space it occupies in the sacred volume, are hardly adequate to account for the deep impression which was made upon the Jewish mind by the memory of him who is the subject of it. Nor do I think that that impression would have been anything like what it was, had it not been for the prophecy which, five hundred years after Elijah's translation, called the attention of the people of Israel to him, in a manner which could not fail to excite their liveliest curiosity. "Behold I will

send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

These words of Malachi's, being, as they are, the very last words of the Old Testament, awakened (as they were so calculated to do, especially when read in connection with Elijah's miraculous removal from the earth) an expectation of the personal reappearance of the great prophet, to usher in that consummation which the Jews looked forward to so anxiously as "the day of the Lord." And from the fact of Elijah's name being thus made use of in the Word of inspiration, I would draw the conclusion that the Holy Spirit designed to give to him a prominence in the annals of God's people which else he might not have assumed to their eyes, and to intimate

that, comparatively few as were the incidents recorded of him, and brief the space they occupied, this was not to be taken as the measure of his importance in the history of the Church of God, or of the degree of study which might profitably be bestowed upon his life and character.

This design of the Holy Spirit, speaking by the prophet, our Lord Jesus Christ may be considered to renew and strengthen in the words I have selected for my text to-day. They are His reply to the question put to Him by Peter, James, and John, when, descending from the Mount of the Transfiguration the day following that event, He bade them "tell no man the vision" they had seen there, "until the Son of Man should be risen from the dead." This encouraged them to break the silence by putting to Him the question, which the appearance of Elijah, with Moses, had suggested to

them, How it was that the Scribes were really wrong, though to all appearance right, in understanding from the prophecy of Malachi that Elijah should come before the Messiah, whereas he had now indeed appeared, but not as the precursor he was promised to be? or, as the inquiry might otherwise be stated, What answer could be given to the objection with which the Scribes met the claims of Jesus, that He could not be the Christ, because Elias had not preceded Him.\* To this Jesus answers in the words of the text—

“Elias truly shall first come and restore all things;” and then proceeds, “But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them. Then” (it is added)

\* ἔλεγον δὲ οἱ τόντ' ἐστιν ὁ Χριστὸς; ἔδει τὸν Ἡλίαν προλαβεῖν.”—CHYRSOSTOM.

“the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.”

The meaning is this: “The Scribes are right in interpreting the prophecy as having reference to Elijah’s coming prior to My coming. But My coming is two-fold, now in humility, hereafter in glory. With regard to the former of these, you may recognise Elijah in him—that dweller in the wilderness, with his raiment of camel’s hair, and leathern girdle about his loins, sustaining life only by what the wilderness supplied—the stern, ascetic preacher of repentance and wrath to come—the undaunted rebuker of royal personages, and (what Elijah would have been could they have had their will) their victim—in John the Baptist you may recognise the harbinger of My first and present advent. For My second, to which you have still to look forward, and will have to look forward, you may not know how long, Elijah shall also be its har-

binger; he ‘shall first come, and restore all things.’ ”

Without giving any opinion upon the much debated question, whether these words of Christ’s warrant the expectation of a personal appearance of our prophet upon earth,\* as antecedent to and premonitory of the “great and dreadful Day” of Judgment; we may feel, I think, that we are upon sure ground in seeing a great spiritual truth embodied in the relation in which they represent Elijah as standing to that day.

Whether or not his person is to usher it in, certain it is that his spirit and his power cannot be dispensed with by the Church, in preparing men to meet it. “Grant,” says our Advent Collect, ad-

\* For a full discussion on this point, see “Greswell the Parables,” vol. i., pp. 152—162. He argues forcibly for the personal reappearance. See also Chrysostom, Hom. in Matt., lvii., al. lviii., who sums up his argument thus—*ὅτι ἀν μὲν γὰρ ἐπηρέστη Ἡλίας μὲν ἐρχεται κ.τ.λ. ἀντὸν Ἡλίαν φησι.*

dressing the Lord Jesus Christ, “that the ministers and stewards of Thy mysteries may so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at Thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in Thy sight.” In the spirit of Elias then, dear brethren, will it be our duty, from time to time, to speak to you, even unto the end of the world; and to the power of Elias—of him who “stood up as fire, and whose word burned like a lamp”\*—will you have to submit yourselves, if we would—both parties—preachers and hearers—stand blameless before the Son of Man at His appearing.

It is this view of our subject which has appeared to me to recommend its selection for your Lenten contemplation. The Church has always recognised a certain affinity between the season of Lent and

\* Eccles., xlvi, 1.

the season of Advent, as seeing that to both the summons of the Baptist, "Repent ye," was equally applicable and appropriate. The Commination Service, read upon Ash Wednesday, sets, as it were, a key-note for our Lenten exhortations; and if ever warnings were indited, full of what we should distinguish as "the spirit of Elias," it is those in that service which, taken from Holy Scripture, occupy the former half of the exhortation which follows the rehearsal of God's sentences against impenitent sinners.

But as we have seen, in the course of the lectures which I now bring to a conclusion, that the spirit of Elias was from time to time qualified, corrected, and softened by the suggestion, if not the infusion, of tenderness, sympathy, and love; so we may remember that the Church, in the later portion of the office of which I have spoken, dwells, with even greater fulness than she does upon the

sterner utterances of Divine truth, upon those blessed and cheering assurances which have their root in, and draw their life from, the fact, that, "although we have sinned, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins."

And if, in the spirit of Elias, his own spirit, as I may call it, and the gentler spirit divinely taught him, the Church has thus been calling upon you during the season now drawing towards its close, question your hearts, dear brethren, whether or not that call has come home to them as with "the power of Elias"—the power of the refiner's fire to melt and to purify, or, if that were not so much needed, to cheer, to warm, and to give light.

The power of Elias! reflect to what it was that power was due, and then say whether you have cause to believe that that power belongs, in due measure, to

yourselves. He prayed that it might not rain, and it rained not; again he prayed that it might rain, and God sent the rain: he prayed that the soul of the widow's child might come into him again, and the soul came, and the child was restored to his mother; he prayed, too, "Hear me, O Lord, hear me," and the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the sacrifice. He prayed! Beloved brethren, do you pray? I ask not about God's answers to your prayers; but simply about your prayers themselves—about your praying or not praying—praying earnestly and in faith, as the Scripture tells us Elias did. Do you so pray?

The power of Elias, then, was the power of prayer, and the spirit of Elias was the spirit of prayer; and this, brethren, is essentially the spirit and the power to which we must look for the restoration of all things, preparatory to our rendering an account at the judg-

ment-seat of Christ. As a speculative question it may be very interesting to inquire whether or not it shall be by a personal ministry upon earth, that Elias's work of reformation shall be carried on in the last days; but as a practical question it concerns us little, if at all. A personal ministry we have going on amongst us even now, and the purpose of that ministry is identical with the purpose which, in the text, our blessed Lord attributes to that of Elias. The ministry to which I refer, is not the imperfect, feeble ministry of creatures subject to like passions as we ourselves are, but it is the ministry of the Holy Ghost, the third Divine Person in the ever-blessed Trinity of Persons that are united in the One only God. And the purpose of which I speak is restoration —your restoration, dear brethren, and mine, and all men's, to the favour of

God which we have forfeited, and to the image and likeness of God which we have lost.

O then! as men and women who are looking for the coming of their Lord, let us give ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, into the hands of this Divine Restorer. Let us become workers together with Him in exterminating all idol-worship—all worldliness, all carnality, and all selfishness—from our own hearts, and setting up in them the altar of self-sacrifice and devotion to the Lord's service, which sin has thrown down. Let us call down rain, "the former and the latter rain" of heavenly grace, "that all things belonging to that Holy Spirit may live and grow in us," and fire, the symbol also of that Spirit's work, that all things which are of the world and the flesh may be destroyed in us. Let us wrestle even with death, striving to win back from his

dominion whatsoever of the divine life imparted to us in our baptism "hath been decayed by the fraud and malice of the devil, or by our own carnal will and frailness." So may we trust that, when we reach the deep, dark Jordan of the grave, the stream may be parted for us to pass through; the prayer, "Suffer us not at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from thee," may be heard in our behalf; in those great water-floods, they may not come nigh our soul. So may we be certain that, on the other shore of that ever-rolling tide, the chariot of fire and the horses of fire will have their counterpart for us in the fulfilment of the Scripture, which saith,

"The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain

shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

THE END.

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